

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION GUIDELINES AND ACTIVITIES FOR
AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN WHO ARE DEAF**

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In Partial Fulfillment
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Doctor of Philosophy**

**by
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ABSTRACT

Religious Education Guidelines and Activities for African American Children Who Are Deaf

by

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Creative and effective religious education guidelines and activities are needed for African American deaf children. These guidelines and activities should emphasize themes of liberation, racial and deaf pride, human dignity, and positive self-images. Education should create a more liberating and just society through learning processes.

Two methods are used to address this problem. The first method employed is a review and evaluation of religious education materials that are available for children who are hearing impaired. Two existing sources are: (1) religious education materials from the Board of Jewish Education of Greater Washington and other Jewish education organizations, and (2) a guide for "Developing and Designing Religious Materials for Deaf People," developed by the National Academy of Gallaudet College and Kendall Green School and co-sponsored by the National Council of Churches. The second method of the dissertation is to analyze works by and about Paulo Freire and Nannie H. Burroughs and to describe their respective learning theories and practices, drawing out guidelines for education that fosters self-esteem, liberation, and pride.

In Chapter 1 learning styles among African American children and deaf children are discussed. Chapter 2 addresses issues related to religion and education for deaf children. The needs of

African American deaf children are also presented. In Chapter 3, a brief explanation is offered on the value of the educational work of Paulo Freire and Nannie H. Burroughs. Their work is described, critiqued, and compared in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively. Biographical information is also included in these two chapters. Chapter 6 is a summary of how their theories and practices could be included in religious education guidelines and activities for African American children who are deaf.

The purpose of Chapter 7 is to discuss, identify, and describe elements which should be included in a religious education program for African American children who are deaf. In Chapter 8, guidelines for religious education for African Americans are identified. Chapter 9 includes sample activities and guidance for planning and implementing religious education for African American deaf children. Since such resources are not currently available, this work will hopefully serve as a catalyst for others to design activities which will meet the needs of this particular community within the Christian community.

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Part One: Religious Education with African American
and Deaf Children

CHAPTER 1

Learning Styles Among African
American and Deaf Children

In the practice of religious education, very little attention is given to special communities of people. Programs are developed and curriculum resources are designed for broad usage, with the expectation that special groups will adapt. Such an approach is often appropriate, but it also reinforces ideas that these special groups are deviations from the norm and that the burden of conforming with the norm is always on them. The particular problem addressed in this dissertation is to focus on one of these special groups so that their particular gifts and needs can be addressed; the implicit hope is that the practice of religious education might be reshaped more broadly to be more inclusive of special communities within the larger community of faith.

No religious education curriculum or programs exist for African American children, ages 5-8, with hearing impairments. In this country, there are approximately 21 million persons who are hearing impaired, five million school aged children who have hearing impairments, and 350,000 persons who are deaf.¹ The church should provide religious education materials for African American children who are deaf if the gospel message is for all. Christian education is limited in addressing the needs of the African American community, particularly the needs of children who

¹ David Hotchkiss, Demographic Aspects of Hearing Impairment: Questions and Answers (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University, Gallaudet Research Institute, 1989), 1.

are hearing impaired in the African American community; therefore, a vital need is for research into the particular needs of African American children who are hearing impaired, and for designs of Christian education that will respond to those needs. In particular, this dissertation addresses those needs and provides educational guidelines and activities for hearing impaired children within the African American community.

Research on Learning Among African American Children

Research which explores learning among African American children ranges from cognitive development to the impact of race on the child's mental ability and personality. Cognitive development has been an important measure in education, and it is defined as: "the lifelong process by which people appropriate knowledge through thinking, discussing, and expressing ideas."² Researchers examine different ways that children and adults learn.

Information regarding learning among African American children has been used to compare the intellectual ability of children as well as to justify particular stereotypes and beliefs that some people have about others. Comparing various racial and ethnic groups feeds into the American phenomena to do comparison analysis between children. The competitive nature and the phenomena of only the strong survive both help to create and add to the belief that a person's intellectual ability and knowledge can be determined by numbers, paper, and a standard norm of written and verbal

² M. F. Hatch, "Cognitive Development," in Harper's Encyclopedia of Religious Education, eds. Iris V. Cully and Kendig Brubaker Cully (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 136.

communication that all persons should know, want to know, understand, and be able to master.

Although there are various areas of research concerning African American children, the following areas will be highlighted --intelligence tests, play, self concept, and culture. These areas are connected to the cognitive development of children because each of these topics expresses ways in which children understand, process, and learn as they gain knowledge. Each of these areas offers analysis and information which have been used to discuss learning in African American children. The intelligence test scores of African American children, for example, provide data which has often been interpreted in a negative way, has been used against African American children, and has affected how children and adults think of them.

One area of study which is very important to Western thought is the intelligence test (IQ test). In the United States, a person's intelligence is often measured according to scores on the various intelligence tests. Children are often given these examinations to determine their intelligence level and their possible academic performance. The more widely known test is the "Stanford-Binet test which yields a single Mental Age (MA) score from which an intelligence Quotient (IQ) can be derived."³ There are also tests available which are designed to measure an infant's intelligence.

³ Amos N. Wilson, The Developmental Psychology of the Black Child (New York: Africana Research Publications, 1978), 117.

Unfortunately, these tests are biased and do not accurately or adequately measure a child's intellectual level. Measuring a child's intellectual competence and ability based on biased standardized tests has been in dispute for many years. The IQ exams have often proven to work against African American children because their scores, compared to white children, are often lower. Comparing the test scores of African American children and white children has been very much a part of studying African American children. Comparing the two groups and finding differences between the two groups serves "as evidence of deficits in American children, and using tests norms on European American children to assess the development of African American children."⁴ This type of testing and scoring affects in a negative way how persons perceive the intellectual ability of African American children. African American children have always been thought of as inferior intellectually to white children. The IQ tests and the ways they have been used only perpetuate these thoughts.

Jawanza Kunjufu pointedly notes how intelligence and achievement tests "are two of the most ill-used and grossly abused procedures employed in the assessment of intelligence and school achievement in Black children."⁵ Various scholars have cited examples of how, as a result of these test scores, African American

⁴ Vonnice C. McLoyd, "What is the Study of African American Children the Study of?" in Black Psychology, 3rd ed., ed. Reginald L. Jones (Berkeley: Cobb & Henry Publishers, 1991), 419.

⁵ Jawanza Kunjufu, Developing Positive Self-Images and Discipline in Black Children (Chicago: African-American Images, 1984), 11.

children are tracked into different levels which can work against them. Once the child is placed in a particular track, she or he is often labeled. This label may follow the child throughout his or her educational experience and can be used against her or him.

Play is an important way to assess a child's cognitive development. Play allows the children to act out their thoughts, feelings, and fantasies. Wilson states that the "child's play is a serious activity in that the form it takes gives shape to the child's more mature intellectual, personality, and social orientation."⁶ The study of play in African American children, even in early childhood, even in early childhood has been conducted. Janice Hale-Benson points out, however, that the research has been limited and narrowly focused by the "preoccupation with comparing the play styles of Black and white children and with teaching Black children certain play styles thought to affect significantly important learning variables."⁷ Through different types of play activity of children, other children and adults can be informed as to what the child is thinking about and ways in which the child behaves or acts out these thoughts. The impact of culture is a significant factor in understanding the child's play activity. Hale-Benson believes that culture influences the child's play and should be examined more carefully in light of the effect that the African American

⁶ Wilson, 114.

⁷ Janice Hale-Benson, Black Children (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 89-90.

experience has on the child's play. She states:

Although some scholars of play have suggested that one's culture shapes one's play, few if any scholars have conducted ethnographical studies of the play of Black children to determine the manner in which the Black milieu shapes the play behavior and the expressive styles of Black children. If it is true that one's culture shapes one's cognition, research in early childhood should specifically describe process.⁸

During times of play, children are teaching themselves and interacting with various objects and other children who can influence their thinking and feelings. Culture is an important influence on the child's play and the child's interpretation of her or his play. Consequently, if the child has an environment which introduces her or him to different types of activities, the child's play can be enriched. Additionally, the more a child is exposed at an early age to positive images about African Americans in the home and other places, the more the child may include these in play activities. This, in turn, can have a positive effect on the child's future understanding of herself or himself as an African American and of the race in general.

Research in the area of self-concept for African American children has been a heated issue for many years. Investigation of how African American children think about themselves has shown that a low level of self-esteem exists. For example, Kunjufu states:

Children are extremely sensitive to the messages that are given by the people around them. They start by learning and sensing how people feel by the silent messages that they receive. Children can feel rejection and negative

⁸ Ibid., 90-91.

racial attitudes that affect their self concept.⁹

Children apprehend how others perceive and respond to them through commercials, television shows, news reports, and various other media displays of negative images and beliefs about African Americans. The feeling of low self-esteem is expressed at an early age in African American children. By the time a child is about 3 years old, she or he is aware of race, and as the child gets older, differences between races are noticed increasingly. These differences are often viewed as negative factors against African American children.

The negative feeling that children have about themselves is evident in the classic research study by Clark and Clark in 1939. The children were given a choice between African American dolls and white dolls. In most instances, the children preferred the white doll. The Clarks concluded, "It is clear that the Negro child by age five is aware of the fact that to be colored in contemporary American society is a mark of inferior status."¹⁰ As children internalize these messages of inferiority, their reflection on themselves does not allow them to think well of themselves or of the African American race. At the same time, research from J. A. Baldwin refutes the studies conducted about self-hatred among African American children. This study indicates that the children exhibit high level of self-esteem, and that cultural differences

⁹ Kunjufu, 16.

¹⁰ Kenneth Clark and Maime Clark, "Emotional Factors in Racial Identification and Reference in Negro Children," Journal of Negro Education 19 (1950): 341-50.

play an important role in how children respond to the particular stimuli and questions asked of them.¹¹

Inapplicable measures for assessing racial attitudes of African American children have also been researched. Researchers such as James A. Baldwin, Raeford Brown, and Reginald Hopkins point out that many of the models for assessing racial attitudes are structured and focused on Western values of "individualism, materialism, determinism, dualism, reductionism and mechanical explanations," to determine "black people's self-orientation or self-concept as it is defined (misperceived or distorted by the European cosmology)."¹² For example, Baldwin, Brown, and Hopkins note that the research findings of M. B. Spencer reveal that

for some African American children to simultaneously maintain positive self-concepts and pro-white cultural values is evidence of the ability of black children to effectively compartmentalize personal identity (i.e., self-concept) from racial attitudes or racial preferences.¹³

Baldwin, Brown, and Hopkins disagree with Spencer's conclusion because it presents the African American child's sense of identity as derived from an individualized and personalized understanding. This approach according to Baldwin, Brown, and Hopkins "directly contradicts the Afrocentric or African worldview perspective in

¹¹ J. A. Baldwin, "Theory and Research Concerning the Notion of Black Self-Hatred: A Review and Reinterpretation," Journal of Black Psychology 5, no. 2 (1979): 70.

¹² James A. Baldwin, Raeford Brown, and Reginald Hopkins, "The Black Self-Hatred Paradigm Revisited: An Africentric Analysis," in Black Psychology, 3rd ed., ed. Reginald L. Jones (Berkeley: Cobb & Henry Publishers, 1991), 154.

¹³ Ibid., 155.

which self is inextricably tied to the collective (racial group), because the self derives its significance by virtue of one's immersion into the collective or group reality."¹⁴

In light of the present research which supports a child's positive reflection of self, or research which supports children's low self-esteem, the concern continues to ensure and develop a child's self-esteem. The need for African American children to develop a positive self-concept is still an area which needs to be researched and given attention. Many children do not think well of themselves, of their race, or their ancestry. This type of destructive thought pattern is acted out in destructive behavior. From a theological perspective, for example, Jacquelyn Grant states in her article "A Theological Framework," that a goal of black theology is to change the destructive behavior of African American people and to change the lives of all oppressed people. Therefore, she states that "to rid ourselves and our community of destructive behavior (drugs, alcohol, self-hatred), black theology leads people to engage in liberating actions emphasizing social, political and economic justice."¹⁵

Various aspects of a child's life will influence how she or he understands the world and the community, individually and collectively. Researchers have found, for example, that the biggest influence on the child in school is the teacher's

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jacquelyn Grant, "A Theological Framework," in Working with Black Youth, eds. Charles R. Foster and Grant Shockley (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 70.

expectation of the child. If the teacher believes the child can succeed, then the child will probably succeed. On the other hand, if the teacher does not believe that the child will succeed, then the child will probably not succeed. A child needs encouragement and genuine interest from the teacher to develop a healthier sense of self.

In Janice Hale-Benson's book Black Children, she emphasizes how biology and culture are important factors influencing child development. Hale-Benson gives support for her theory through the research and critique of various scholars such as Jean Piaget, T. Ward, and Asa Hillard. For example, Benson cites an example from Ward, who questions "How much of the variance among people is attributable to culture and how much to maturational factors? The present state of the art does not allow us to make a definitive statement."¹⁶ Hale-Benson also raises Piaget's concern for this matter.

The kind of psychology we develop in our social environments remains conjectural as long as comparative, extensive and systematic research is not available; a great effort is still to be made in this direction.... Only such studies allow us to separate the effects of biological and mental factors from those of social and cultural influences on the formation and socialization of individuals.¹⁷

According to Hale-Benson, in order to understand the African American child, we must accept and understand the context in which the child lives because the context is very crucial to the

¹⁶ Hale-Benson, 21.

¹⁷ Ibid.

development of the child. Therefore the child's culture becomes very important. Asa Hillard, who wrote the preface for Hale-Benson's book, supports Hale-Benson's belief:

Abundant data shows that culture patterns influence the way information is perceived, organized, processed, and utilized. Consequently, a discussion of the growth, development, and cognition of the African American child must take into account that culture is one of the greatest environment variables.¹⁸

Hale-Benson's work emphasizes the need for African American children to receive an education in a culturally enriching environment which challenges African American children to develop their intellectual abilities and develop their talents and skills. For Benson, this type of educational environment would affirm the child's identity, provide ways of learning which are reflective of the African American culture, and encourage students to strive for the best in all aspects of life. This educational environment would emphasize language/communication skills, mathematical concepts, positive self-concept, positive attitude toward learning and school, and African American studies. Through creating an environment in which affective behavior, arts and crafts, music, and small group learning are used as learning vehicles, the children would have a rich and rewarding educational setting. This would encourage them to learn about themselves and others, to develop intellectually and socially to meet various challenges, and to become victorious in living and learning.

¹⁸ Asa G. Hillard, foreword to Black Children, by Janice Hale-Benson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), xxii.

Research on Learning for Deaf Children

Both African American children and deaf children (regardless of color) are considered subgroups within the general population, groups which are given minority status. Research is very much focused on comparing children from both of these groups with white children who are hearing. The need for the subgroups to be compared to the dominant group (as mentioned previously) is very much a part of the American rationale which compares the haves with the have nots to justify and support why the haves and have nots should stay in their respective groups.

Because of the inferior status of both groups, laws have been enacted to ensure their right to education, housing, jobs, and other socially acceptable rights of hearing and physically able Euro-American people. For example, in 1954, the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was intended to end the separate but equal rights of the segregated schools. This ruling put into motion a law that gave African American children and other children of color the right to receive an equal education. Another example is the 1975 Disability Rights Law - The Education of All Handicapped Children Act. This law "declares that all children with disabilities are entitled to a free, appropriate education in the 'least restrictive' environment."¹⁹ Laws are needed to help put into place regulations and policies to help bring about change and create a better society.

¹⁹ Merle Froschl et al., Including All of Us (New York: Educational Equity Concepts, 1984), 16.

A variety of topics have been researched concerning learning and deaf children. Among the areas of research are cognitive development, language, play, and communication skills. Research which discusses the deaf child in relationship to cognitive development, communication skills, and language will be highlighted.

Research in the area of cognitive development for deaf children has been faced with criticisms as in the case of cognitive development for African American children. Language bias and structures for hearing Eurocentric children are often the paradigm for how and what will be tested. The emphasis on standard English is a barrier for many children. Moores notes in his work, as Kunjufu and others have stated:

Evidence suggests that children who do not speak standard English are more likely to be discriminated against by such tests and placed in special classes in disproportionate numbers. The disadvantage for deaf children is even more severe. In many cases they possess minimal speech skills and have difficulty understanding what is expected of them unless the psychometrist is experienced in dealing with deaf children. As a rule, the scores of deaf children tend to be depressed if a test requires proficiency in speech or speechreading or in knowledge of standard English.²⁰

Trying to determine a child's cognitive development based on tests which are culturally biased presents numerous obstacles that the child must learn to decode and translate into language which is understandable. Deaf children, whose culture and communication skills do not fit into the standardized norm of intelligence tests

²⁰ Donald F. Moores, Educating the Deaf, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 154-55.

or other achievement tests, will not measure up to the standards which have been developed for hearing children whose culture and life experiences are different.

According to Moores, three stages of thought have emerged from research about the cognitive development of deaf children--Stage 1: The Deaf as Inferior; Stage 2: The Deaf as Concrete; and Stage 3: The Deaf as Intellectually Normal. In the first stage, the deaf were regarded as inferior; this was based on the research of Pitner and of other researchers during the first half the twentieth century.²¹ Deaf children were considered retarded as a result of studies by Pitner and other researchers who made similar evaluations and draw similar conclusions. Pitner's research demonstrated that "deaf children between 1900 and 1930...were retarded three to four years in comparison with hearing children, and they usually scored in the low 90's when tested with performance IQ scales."²² The view of deaf children as inferior to hearing children is consistent with the general attitude that deaf people are "deaf and dumb."

The second stage of the thinking about deafness, Deaf as Concrete, is described by Moores. This stage was influenced by studies conducted by Mykleburst; he concluded that deaf children are "generally not inferior in intelligence" to hearing children, but there is a qualitative difference between deaf and hearing

²¹ Moores, 155.

²² R. Pitner, J. Eisenson, and M. Stanton, The Psychology of the Physically Handicapped (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1941), 47.

children.²³ Another conclusion made by Mykleburst and Brutton was that deaf children are more concrete than abstract in their thoughts. This belief has been held true by many educators of deaf children, and because the categories of concrete and abstract have not always been defined, the terms have been used to cover a variety of ways in which people behave. This view ultimately is translated into the separation between the have and the have nots. This is reflected in the following statements:

The result is that concrete and abstract name all sorts of behaviors having no clear common properties. These unwitting shifts in reference are responsible for the general agreement that all kinds of subhuman minds are concrete, as opposed to the abstract mind of the healthy, civilized adult.²⁴

The final stage of thinking, the Deaf as Intellectually Normal, emerged from studies indicating that deaf children are of normal intelligence. Various researchers such as Rosenstein and Vernon reported in the 1960s that deaf children do not score lower in intelligence than hearing children. Since that time, other tests have been given, such as the WISC to deaf children. From the evaluation of the test scores, researchers found that "deaf children performed in a manner similar to that of hearing children on all the performance subtests except for Coding and Picture Arrangement. On these two subtests, the deaf children performed significantly below their hearing peers."²⁵

²³ Moores, 155.

²⁴ Moores, 156.

²⁵ Kathryn Meadows, Deafness and Child Development (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 49.

In conclusion, different studies throughout the years have revealed that deaf children are within the normal range of performance on various intelligence tests. Yet, how the tests are administered is important. If the administrator of the test is not able to sign and/or is not aware of the needs of the deaf child, the child will not begin with the same opportunity to know what is expected. If the test does not involve a high level of language "either in input (instruction) or output (response)," then the child will have a better chance of performing in the normal range of test scoring.²⁶

Language is another important and debated topic of discussion among researchers concerned with the cognitive development of deaf children. Whether language is needed for a child to learn has been a source of heated discussion for many years. Even as far back as the ancient days of Greece and Rome, persons who were not able to speak were not thought of as having the ability to think. This led to thinking about deaf children and adults as not completely human, as unintelligent. Although these beliefs have begun to change, researchers are still debating the significance of language agility in a person's cognitive development.

The connection between thought and language in deaf children has caused researchers to question the notion that language is necessary for development. For years, deaf mute was the negative term for persons who were deaf because they did not speak. Unfortunately, hearing persons are not always aware that many deaf

²⁶ Meadows, 49-50.

persons can speak; deaf persons often choose not to speak in front of hearing persons, however, because they are aware that hearing often persons do not understand them and that the voices of deaf persons have a rough and grating sound. This sound is aggravating and hard for hearing persons to listen to. The first time this writer heard a deaf person speak it was a painful experience for me because her voice hurt my ears, and I felt a grating feeling inside of my body.

Verbal language has often been thought of as one of the best indicators to determine a person's intellectual ability. Because many persons who are hearing impaired do not speak, the question is asked, "What do the deaf think in?"²⁷ This question has been asked because people who are hearing do not know or understand what it means not to hear. Therefore, people conclude that persons who are non-hearing must have something wrong with their brains. "Deaf children are the best witnesses that language is not an indispensable means for early intellectual development."²⁸ Their lack of language skills does not mean they do not think or are less intelligent than hearing persons. "However, mental capacities need nourishment, and every child thrives on environmental and social encouragement. Many families of deaf children are not inventive enough to find other than verbal--and there are many means of

²⁷ Hans Furth, Thinking Without Language (New York: Free Press, 1966), 223.

²⁸ Hans Furth, Deafness and Learning: A Psychosocial Approach (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing, 1973), 46.

communication."²⁹

The language and thought debate was opened up even further by a research study over ten years ago that was based on tests given to deaf and hearing children; it demonstrated that language is not necessary for a child to develop certain cognitive skills. A test conducted by Rittenhouse and Shapiro in 1979 for deaf and hearing children to compare the children's understanding of conservation problems yielded a surprising result. Deaf and hearing children were both able to give rational reasons when asked by the investigator about their respective answers to the various problems. It should be noted that the administrator of the tests was proficient in sign and oral communication, which probably accounts for the deaf children being able to participate more fully in the tests.³⁰ In spite of the limits and barriers that society imposes on persons who are non-hearing, research has shown that "when most hearing impaired children reach adolescence and adulthood, they often become well-adjusted."³¹

It appears that the need for good communication is essential when administering tests, especially for deaf children. As mentioned earlier, Meadows maintains that deaf children will probably perform better on tests that are communicated in ways they understand. This allows both deaf and hearing children to understand what to do. As a result of poor communication, reports

²⁹ Ibid., 45.

³⁰ Moores, 163.

³¹ Jane Hyman, Deafness (New York: Franklin Watts, 1980), 21.

of "low performance in other studies probably was due not to lower cognitive skills or to a lack of language but to limitations in standard English vocabulary and grammar and in oral English skills."³²

Verbal communication may not become the dominate way of communicating for their deaf children. Yet, having the ability to communicate through sign or oral communication will help deaf children to articulate their thoughts to others. The following list of terms is used to describe the various methods of communication that are used by deaf persons.

American Sign Language (ASL and AMESLAN) - In ASL a sign is made with one or two hands for each word or idea. There are more than 500,00 signs in ASL. ASL is a language in and of itself.

Signed English - This method is a word-for-word translation of spoken English into signs.

Fingerspelling - This involves use of the manual alphabet; words are formed letter by letter with the fingers of one hand.

Oral Method - Communication occurs through speech reading (lip reading) and an amplification of sound. Speech is used, and signs are prohibited.

Total Communication - This is a philosophy in which full communication is established through the employment of one or a combination of the above methods.³³ It involves sign language, fingerspelling, reading, writing, and other possible means of conveying ideas, language, and vocabulary.³⁴

The ability of deaf children to express their thoughts and feelings

³² Moores, 163.

³³ Froschl et al., 136.

³⁴ Lottie Riekehof, The Joy of Signing (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1978), 7.

is important to their development. Hearing children are encouraged to speak out and speak up for themselves and the rights of others; deaf children should be encouraged do the same through whatever means of communication will benefit them. Hearing people will need to change their limited way of communicating and learn the best avenues of communication with deaf children.

Conclusions and Directions
for the Dissertation

Learning for African American children and deaf children in general requires that educators, families, the church, and anyone else interested in the welfare of children continue to work toward making changes. These changes will include addressing the cultural and educational needs of the children. All children do not learn in the same way. Hence, the educational environment needs to be one that is rich, with varied experiences to stimulate the children's minds and provide them with a variety of educational opportunities.

Deaf children need persons who can interact and communicate with them. The experiences of deaf children will be different from hearing children because they bring a different set of experiences and ways of understanding and feeling to a situation. The experiences the child has, particularly if a sign or some form of communication can be connected to these experiences, will help the child communicate experiences to someone else. Also, the more experiences the child has of the world, the bigger the picture the child will have to see the world.

In a society that is very much word-oriented, a child who does not have adequate skills in speaking, writing, or reading English is at a great disadvantage. Job opportunities, educational pursuits, recreation, and religious activities may often be out of reach. If the child does receive guidance, love, and the opportunity to develop communication skills and to express thoughts and feelings, and if the child has someone who believes in her or him, the child will have a better chance in life.

At the same time, we must face the reality that both African American children and deaf children face discrimination. Discrimination and prejudice toward both groups must be addressed. African American children need to have constructive frameworks to cope with and dismantle racism. African American children who are deaf must learn how to cope with racism and discrimination because of both their race and their deafness.

Communication skills for African American children have been a topic of heated debate by many researchers. Deaf children are penalized because of their inability to hear or speak in an acceptable way, and this attitude is acted out towards African American children as well. They are also penalized because they do not speak or write in a style which is acceptable to hearing persons who speak standard English.

Communication, varied experiences, love, attention, guidance, educational diversity (curriculum, activities, and more) are some of the necessary ingredients for enriching any child's learning opportunities. Hopefully, as more persons become sensitive to the

needs of others who are similar, but different (e.g., race, ability, sex, or religious affiliation), positive changes will occur politically, economically, educationally, and socially for everyone.

In light of the needs of African American children and deaf children, as well as the present attitude and behavior towards persons who are different from the norm, this dissertation addresses how religious education can meet the educational needs of African American children who are deaf. The church is very much an oral community, and the written word for parishioners (to read and comprehend) has been elevated as well. Therefore, what can religious education do to help all children, especially African American deaf children, who live in a very verbal society?

A further problem is that we live in a society that has established in the United States and abroad that standard United States English is the norm for communicating with others. The push for a monolanguage culture has created language barriers for persons living within the United States and those who want to live or do business with the United States. This is a form of arrogance which reflects a strong bias and prejudice against those who communicate in a different language.

Learning to think and interact in this society as a person whose race and ability are questioned, mocked, and categorized as subhuman requires that children learn survival skills at an early age. These skills can and must be provided by the church through its religious education programs. The church within the African

American community remains the strongest and most viable force to lead the way for not only African American deaf children, but for all children who have various abilities. The love of God and the love of your neighbor as yourself serve as the foundation from which the African American church must operate.

CHAPTER 2

Religious Education Resources for Deaf Children

In this chapter religious education resources for deaf children are presented. The resources provided are not extensive, but give a general overview of what religious education resources are available. Also, particular concerns of the African American deaf community are discussed, as well as how the church can respond to these needs. Finally, an overview of the religious response to deafness is presented.

A variety of resources exists which address concerns and needs related to religion and education for deaf children in general. The resources can be traced to the early 700s in Europe, and in the United States work in this area is dated to the early 1800s. Some of these earlier sources are from the work of Pedro Ponce de Leon in Spain and Charles Michael l'Epee of France, both of whom worked with deaf children from noble families. Ponce de Leon taught "several young deaf Spanish noblemen not only to read and write, but also to speak."¹ L'Eppe, a French priest, was the first person to "conduct a 'class' for deaf children."²

Since that time various faith communities have examined and developed materials for teaching and addressing religion with deaf adults and children. Yet, in the Gallaudet College and Kendall Green (elementary school for the deaf) 1981 workshop on religious education materials for deaf people, participants raised a concern

¹ Meadows, Deafness and Child Development, 160.

² Ibid., 161.

that religious materials were limited for deaf people. The participants pointed out that a variety of resources should be used. These resources should include materials not only for religious settings but also for other types of educational environments. This would provide a greater source of materials from which educators could draw in developing religious education materials. Many of the participants thought that "secular resources and religious resources" should be used in helping to provide effective and helpful materials for deaf people.³

This section presents some of the religious education resources and other written resources about deaf people and deafness that can be used as sources of information for religious education. The resources listed in this presentation provide general and historical information as well. Information which focuses on issues related to African Americans and deafness and the theology of deafness are also included. This type of information is helpful in assisting persons to learn more about the deaf community.

One of the leading faith communities in developing and designing educational materials for deaf people is the Jewish community. Within the Jewish faith, a variety of resources examine the needs of deaf persons and provide guidelines, suggestions, and practical how-to's for persons working deaf persons. Other

³ Workshop on Developing and Designing Religious Materials for Deaf People, sponsored by National Academy of Gallaudet College, Kendall Green [School], and National Council of Churches in Christ (U.S.A.), at Gallaudet College and Kendall Green, Washington, D.C., 27-29 May 1981, manual published in 1982, n.p.

materials have been designed by the Jewish community to assist persons with various types of disabilities to learn about their faith.

Deaf persons are also active in the Jewish community, addressing their own needs. For example, Stephen Brenner, who is deaf and President of Washington (D.C.) Society of Jewish Deaf, discusses how the Jewish congregations need to be more responsive and caring to their own people, not ignoring Jewish deaf people or turning them away from the synagogues.⁴ In spite of the many barriers that deaf Jewish persons are working to tear down and change within the Jewish faith, resources are available for adults and children to learn about their faith.

In the religious education materials for Jewish deaf children, there is an important emphasis placed on the child's understanding her or his Jewish identity. What it means to be Jewish is quite explicit in the games, songs, prayers, and various articles written about Jewish deaf persons. A sense of pride runs through these materials which cannot be ignored.

The materials which were provided to me for review are from the Board of Jewish Education of Greater Washington, Special Needs Department. This organization is a good place for resources concerning Jewish deaf children. The director of the special needs department is Sara Simon. Their materials cover a variety of

⁴ Stephen Brenner, "Rabbinic Outreach to Individuals with Special Needs and to Their Families," paper delivered at conference on Rabbinic outreach, Board of Jewish Education, Rockville, Md., 19 September 1989.

resources and information concerning children with special needs. The facility is also designed very nicely for all children and adults to participate actively in the various activities at the center. Children who are blind, deaf, physically impaired, and otherwise disabled have many resources from which they can choose. The various activities provided for deaf and hearing children are fun and educational. All of the activities reinforce Jewish belief and the pride of Jewish people.

The resources concerning deaf Jewish persons are rich with the proud heritage of Judaism. This is a strong point throughout the materials. Books, speeches, articles, games, and other activities emphasize the need for Jewish children to learn about their Jewish heritage and what holidays and other traditions should be observed. For example, one game is designed for children to learn about the Tzedakah Box. Tzedakah, as stated on the game board, is the Jewish expression of giving of yourself and your money. Each child is given a box which contains pictures that represent the various places where he or she should actively participate in Tzedakah. Illustrations representing the family, home, celebration services and meals, Israel, and the United States remind the children to remember that their giving is to reach beyond their own families. At the same time, the pictures remind the children that Tzedakah is part of the Jewish faith and culture. The picture of Israel visually reminds the children to think of and remember their homeland.

The songs and the blessings are illustrated with a picture of

a boy signing the song or blessing. One example is the four questions which are asked at the Passover meal. A young boy is portrayed as the signer of the questions which are to be asked at the evening meal. The words are written out, accompanied by pictures of the signer signing each word.⁵ Each of the songs and the blessings reflect Jewish beliefs and traditions that are important aspects of the faith.

An important event in the Jewish community is the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a very special time in a boy's or girl's life. Through this event, a "boy or girl at the age of 13 is expected to assume the full responsibilities in religious duties; for their own actions and is also given full adult privileges in the tradition...."⁶ Yet, children who are deaf have not always been able to participate in this celebrated ceremony because they did not have someone who could and would spend the time helping them to study. The Board of Jewish Education of Greater Washington offers children and their parents the opportunity to participate in a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Courses, tutors, prayers, and other important aspects of this special occasion are offered for the children and their parents to make this event a special and joyous occasion.

The United Synagogue of America has published an instructional guide entitled A Leader's Guide for "Is Someone Listening." The

⁵ E. Lederfeind, director, "Pesach: The Four Questions," Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, photocopy, 1983, n.p.

⁶ Adele Kronick Shuart, Signs in Judaism, ed. Muriel Strassler (New York: National Congress of Jewish Deaf, 1986), 96.

guide is designed as an instructional tool for the video Someone is Listening. This video tells the "story about a deaf teenager who meets a rabbi who communicates in sign language and, with the rabbi's guidance, becomes Bar Mitzvah."⁷ All ages will be able to relate to this story. This guide sheet can be changed to accommodate younger children as well older persons. It not only helps persons to think about the movie, but also provides persons with questions to stimulate their thinking and explore their own feelings about deaf persons. These questions are not limited to the Jewish faith, but they are important questions for all communities of faith to answer. In answering these questions, children and adults are encouraged to think beyond their own immediate community and to expand God's banquet table for others to join. Questions asked include:

1. How do you feel when you are in the presence of someone who is hearing impaired?
2. Would a deaf person feel comfortable in your school? home? synagogue?
3. Are there any Jewish rituals from which a disabled person should be excluded?
4. What does the following biblical phrase mean to you: Do not curse the deaf?⁸

⁷ A Leader's Guide for "Someone is Listening," Rockville, Md.: United Synagogue of America, Commission on Jewish Education, photocopy to accompany video, n.d., 1.

⁸ Ibid., 8.

In his book, Creating A Caring Congregation, Harold Wilke addresses the need for congregations to prepare themselves to have an inclusive congregation and for all persons to be invited to God's banquet table. He reminds us that the weak and the disabled are at the center of God's concern and not only the healthy and wealthy persons. The above questions relate to this inclusion and force persons to examine themselves. Although the questions listed above pertain to Judaism, they are questions that congregations can use as a guide for developing programs for children who are deaf and for including these children in the total structure of the church.

Overall, the various materials which were included in the packet about deafness and Judaism are quite helpful in giving a general overview about what has been the historical-biblical attitude about deaf persons within Judaism. Also, the activities and other resources in the packet are helpful guides regarding on how to include deaf persons within the life of the synagogue. Ample information is also provided about how hearing persons should be aware of their attitudes and actions toward deaf persons.

One of the drawbacks of the materials is that most of the illustrations are of males. The children are either young boys or teenage boys who are signing the songs and blessings. Even in the illustration which shows older children and teenagers dressed as various biblical characters, four boys are drawn as the characters in the play. Picturing more girls and women as signers for songs and the blessings, and participating in passover meals and other

events would portray a more inclusive image of Judaism--one more consistent with the stated goal of becoming more inclusive of persons who are deaf.

As the Jewish community becomes more open to dealing with and including deaf Jewish persons within the faith, maybe it will expand its boundaries to work with other communities of faith. There is much to be learned from and about Judaism, as well as from other faith communities. The willingness of hearing persons to be inclusive of deaf people is found throughout the written materials. Hopefully, hearing Jewish children and adults will be more open in including deaf persons as part of the faith. Again, God's banquet table is not limited to those with whom we choose to eat, but is open for the "least of these" to come and dine.

The second resource, developed by Gallaudet College and Kendall Green in Washington, D.C., is entitled Workshop on Developing and Designing Religious Materials for Deaf People. This workshop was co-sponsored by the National Academy of Gallaudet College and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. The workshop was held for religious leaders from various faith communities who were interested in religious education materials for deaf persons. Each participant was given a manual that included such information as practical instruction on how to design and write religious materials for deaf persons and suggestions for how leaders can guide deaf students through various educational and religious education lessons. During the workshop, the participants were given opportunities to work on activities in

the manual that provided guidance on how to write and review written materials designed for deaf persons. In addition to the wide range of instructional materials and guidelines, the manual included religious education activities, resources for interpreters, and a list of resources related to religious education for deaf persons within various faith communities.

In the opening keynote address of the workshop, Harold Wilke emphasized the need for persons who are hearing impaired or living with any other disability to "Come out of the attic!"⁹ He also stated that persons with disabilities should not hide from society, "Let your body, your person be seen in society. Do not hide behind whatever particular armor plates all of us psychologically hide behind."¹⁰ Wilke reminds each of us that we need to learn how to communicate effectively with one another and to be open to all members of the body of Christ.

The workshop manual lists eleven objectives which the workshop and the manual were to address. These objectives range from "defining hearing loss and deafness to identifying resources for assistance in development and design of materials for deaf people."¹¹ Materials and resources within the manual speak to the various objectives and offer helpful guidelines on how to approach particular problems related to designing materials for deaf people.

⁹ Harold Wilke, address delivered at "Workshop on Developing and Designing Religious Materials for Deaf People," Gallaudet College and Kendall Green [School], Washington, D.C., 27 May 1982.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

There are practice sheets for persons to write instructional sentences and objectives for various lessons for deaf children. Format, use of illustrations and graphics, and even the size of the lettering are discussed. The themes of consistency and age-specific, educational-specific objectives for various groups are presented. Deaf children often have a harder time grasping abstract thoughts and have fewer chances for a variety of experiences than other children. The manual suggests that designers of materials should move from concrete to abstract thinking in order to give the child an opportunity to have experiences which relate them to abstract ideas. For example, in the story of Noah and the Ark, teachers are instructed to use picture of animals in a card matching game for children to learn the idea of two-by-two. This will help the child to understand that the animals walked together in a set of twos.

Participants in the 1981 conference expressed the need for more resources to be developed which respond to the needs of various religious and racial groups. Although the manual is directed toward a reading audience, the illustrations and examples cited are directed toward a white audience. The use of pictures of males and females is demonstrated throughout the manual, but the pictures are of white children and adults. Using inclusive language is not emphasized in the manual, but helping persons to develop materials for hearing impaired children is stressed. Hearing persons are reminded that when resources are designed for the deaf community, deaf persons are the ultimate audience.

Therefore, the materials need to be designed and written for the deaf community. For example, the word "it" is often a hard concept for deaf persons to understand in reading, so "it" should be replaced by the object to which it refers. Therefore, the format, designs, and suggestions should be focused on the deaf audience as the principal group who will read and benefit from the materials.

The materials include writing guidelines for younger and older students. For instance, limiting the number of sentences per page, the use of graphics to highlight certain words, and highlighting new words or concepts are stated as ways of writing for deaf children which will help them to understand the lesson. For example, the direct negation of the word no is grasped by most deaf high school students, yet most deaf high school students have a difficult time with words that imply negation. For example, sentences like "Little rain falls in the desert," or "Few people live in glass houses," should not be used.¹² Younger deaf children can understand simple sentences without complex meaning. These suggestions are helpful in considering what can or should be included in developing religious materials for deaf children.

The manual for developing materials is an excellent resource for helping hearing persons to understand some of the nuances and communication difficulties that deaf children and adults may encounter. Using the example of Noah's Ark, the teacher is given several examples of ways to assist children in learning particular concepts. These suggestions stimulate thoughts on other games and

¹² Ibid.

activities which can be done to reinforce this story and other stories.

One of the few limitations of this resource was stated earlier; the pictures used throughout the manual are not reflective of the broader deaf community from a cross-cultural perspective. At the same time, the illustrations do represent gender and age diversity of white deaf persons. Seeing persons with hearing aids in the manual provides a positive image of deaf persons actively involved in various occupations and activities. The various illustrations of persons wearing hearing aids and doing sign language reinforce what Harold Wilke communicated in his opening speech about inclusiveness.

Participants in the workshop felt that various faith communities in the United States and Canada needed to be more fully represented. For example, persons attending the workshop noted how the manual, as well as participants in the workshop, needed to cover a wider range of religious perspectives than those from a white Protestant view. Also, religious and ethnic groups in other parts of the world could be highlighted to give the children other global experiences. Learning about other cultures and communities is helpful to children in broadening their worldviews.

One of the strong features of the manual is that many of the materials can be adapted for leaders to use with hearing children. An example is the questions presented in the manual for leaders to use as a guide when preparing lessons. These questions are applicable for all teachers and leaders to use when preparing

lessons for deaf or hearing children. Also, suggestions on how to format a lesson for younger children (e.g., highlighting new words and illustrations to emphasize or introduce a point,) can benefit hearing children as well.

Also, the key to learning for children is communication. The manual offers designers of religious materials the opportunity to sharpen skills needed to communicate with deaf children. If religious educators use the guidelines from the manual to design activities and materials for deaf children, the children will have materials to them which they can relate. The manual offers creative and clear ways of communication which can strengthen opportunities for deaf children to learn.

The Gallaudet workshop manual is an excellent resource for persons wanting to learn more about the needs of deaf persons. Stereotypes, attitudes, and barriers to deaf persons are addressed. Readers are given the chance to confront their own attitudes toward deaf persons and deaf persons' abilities. Learning about yourself and your attitudes toward others is a key to unlocking doors which are barriers to learning about others.

In understanding the dynamics of religious education for deaf people, several books give insightful information about how this educational process has taken place. Practical educational applications, as well as theological reflections on educational needs of deaf persons, are discussed. The resources provide background information on how the church has responded to deaf persons throughout the years and the impact the religious

communities have had on how deaf persons are perceived.

Descriptive Analysis of Deafness

One book which looks at the issue of deafness from different perspectives is Seeing Voices by Oliver Sacks. Sacks presents an overview of deafness, the minority status that comes with being deaf, and the impact of the student protest at Gallaudet. Sacks' book looks at education, philosophy, religion, and responses from deaf persons, and he writes a witty, perceptive book concerning deafness.

Throughout the years, according to Sacks, the mention of deafness or deaf people to hearing people has brought ignominious or strange looks and unconcern. Ignorance and indifference are the terms Sacks uses to describe how hearing persons understand deaf persons.¹³ Sacks notes that until recently he also responded in this way to deafness: "Deafness? Don't know any deaf people. Never thought much about it. There's nothing interesting about deafness, is there?"¹⁴

This attitude has played a major role in education of the deaf, and only gradually did educators begin to attend to the unique needs of deaf children. Ponce de Leon wanted the deaf students to be able to become a part of Christianity through learning how to pray, helping with Mass, learning the Christian

¹³ Oliver Sacks, Seeing Voices (New York: HarperPerennial, 1989), 1.

¹⁴ Ibid.

doctrines, and confessing through speech.¹⁵ Other educators such as "the Braidwoods in Britain, Amman in Holland, and Pereire and Deschamps in France were all hearing educators who achieved greater or lesser success in teaching some deaf persons to speak."¹⁶ Sign language was heavily emphasized as part of the educational process. Although educational opportunities before 1750 for children who were deaf was almost 100 percent unavailable.¹⁷

Sacks examines the historical influences of philosophy and religion on deafness. He notes, for example, how Abbe Sicard and Aristotle responded to deafness. Most critics believe that Aristotle thought that "deafness automatically precluded the ability to speak."¹⁸ Beryl Lieff Benderly points out, however, that Aristotle was misunderstood. Benderly quotes Aristotle: "Those who become deaf from birth also become altogether speechless. Voice is not lacking, but there is no speech."¹⁹ Benderly believes that Aristotle was misunderstood "because many took 'speechless' to mean 'stupid,' and this led persons to think for over a thousand years that the congenitally deaf were necessarily congenital morons."²⁰ Therefore, Benderly interprets

¹⁵ Meadows, 161.

¹⁶ Sacks, 14.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Meadows, 160.

¹⁹ Beryl Lieff Benderly, Dancing Without Music, Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet Press, 1980, 107.

²⁰ Ibid.

Aristotle's words to mean that because their voice is not developed as a result of not being able to hear, deaf persons cannot speak, and not that persons who are born deaf are stupid.

Certainly, the common belief expressed in Greco-Roman philosophy that symbols had to be in the form of speech--reinforced the common assumption that deaf persons were unable to think. Sacks quotes that Abbe Sicard who assumed that the deaf person has "no symbols for fixing and combining ideas....that there is a total communication-gap between him and other people."²¹ Therefore, Sicard believed, that language was important if persons were to communicate effectively with one another.

The beliefs of Aristotle and Sicard did not help to advance a positive perception of deafness. They reinforced the prevailing belief that a person could not learn because she or he could not speak. Socrates, however, did think that the communication between non-speaking persons was a form of communication. Socrates notes in the Cratylus of Plato:

If we had neither voice nor tongue, and yet wished to manifest things to one another, should we not, like those who are present mute, endeavor to signify our meaning by the hands, and other parts of the body?²²

With the exception of Socrates, many ancient philosophies created difficult barriers and second class status for the non-hearing.

According to Sacks, the influence of religion was also deadly. For Sacks the "passionate misperception, or prejudice went back to

²¹ Sacks, 15.

²² Ibid.

biblical days: the subhuman status of mutes was part of the Mosaic code."²³ This perception was found in the "exaltation of the voice and ear as the one and true way in which man and God could speak ('In the beginning was the Word')." ²⁴ Sacks believes that this belief impacted the hearing and deaf community in negative ways.

One implicit thrust of Sacks' book is a theological question--What is humanity? Sacks asks the questions:

What is necessary,...for us to become complete human beings? Is our humanity, so-called, partly dependent on language? What happens to us if we fail to acquire language? Does language develop spontaneously and naturally, or does it require contact with other human being?"²⁵

Throughout this book, in the stories of deaf persons and in descriptions of deafness, Sacks conveys the view of deaf persons as complete human beings. The joy and pain he feels in learning about the difficult and life-giving experiences of deaf persons is illustrated by his own experiences with deaf persons, particularly with children.

Questions concerning humanity are answered by Sacks toward the end of the book. Humanity is connected to interaction with other people. The ability to communicate and have others respond to you helps a person grow better intellectually, spiritually, socially, and emotionally. Each of us needs to live in relationships with others in order to develop a better quality of life.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 37.

Sacks emphasizes the need for communication through language:

Language arises biologically-from below, from the irrepressible need of the human individual to think and communicate. But it is also generated, and transmitted-culturally-from above, a living and urgent embodiment of the history, of the world-views, the images and passions of a people.²⁶

Sacks also emphasizes communication when he speaks of Sign. Sign in this instance means American Sign Language (Ameslan or ASL). This form of sign language is an indigenous form of communication among deaf persons. Ameslan does not follow the grammatical order of English. The need for communication among deaf persons and the use of Sign helps to build the bridge of communication that is needed for deaf persons.

Sign for the deaf is a unique adaptation to another sensory mode; but it is also, and equally, an embodiment of their personal and cultural identity. For in language of a people, Herder observes, "resides its whole thought and domain, its tradition, history, religion, and basis of life, all of its heart and soul." This is especially true of Sign, for it not only biological but culturally-and unsilenceably-the voice of the deaf.²⁷

Another important aspect of Sacks' book is the discussion of pride in the lives of deaf people. For example, the 1987 protest led by students at Gallaudet who were agitating for a deaf president, reminds us of how people need to have persons in authority who speak their language and understand their culture. Seeing such strong protest by the students of Gallaudet made the world take notice. The students were able to ban together and draw support and visibility from the larger community. The

²⁶ Ibid., 125.

²⁷ Ibid.

students were successfully able to barricade the campus, have vigils, and work together for their demands to be heard. Sacks points out that the students did not organize by themselves. Students worked with "the active support of alumni, and of deaf organizations and leaders all around the country."²⁸ Through the constant media reports, something happened in the deaf community and in the country. Persons involved in the protest even referred to the march in Selma. The civil rights movement of the 1960s was a connecting point for these students, and a revival of persons' bannings together to fight for their rights had been brought into the forefront not by race, but by discrimination and prejudice toward deaf persons.

The concern for pride is another reason why Sacks is a strong advocate for Sign. He does not have much appreciation for signed English because it is only a transliteration of English, and not the actual indigenous language of deaf people. He believes that signed English is a form of communication which is accommodating for hearing people, but not for deaf persons.

Deafness and Child Development by Kathryn P. Meadow is a book that presents facts on various aspects of childhood development--social, psychological, cognitive, and linguistic development in children with deafness. Meadows believes that "a developmental approach to the study of behavior in deaf children can provide a needed theoretical perspective for practioners working with those

²⁸ Sacks, 136.

children...."²⁹ Studying deaf children "throughout the life cycle may also help to resolve the conflict that currently surrounds the formation of educational policy for deaf children."³⁰ Further study will help to better understand how deaf children develop. This type of research has not been done as extensively as research on hearing children. Persons working with deaf children as well as policy makers, can benefit from knowing more about the development of deaf children. Negative attitudes and ideas and lack of information do not give educators the background resources needed to argue effectively for how deaf children develop and how they can learn.

Like Seeing Voices by Sacks, this book is a journey through points in Meadow's life which brought her to a concern with deafness. While Sacks' book reads more like a story, Meadows' book is clinical and factual finding. The second half of her book offers more personal information. Meadows, unlike Sacks, is a believer in deaf children and their parents communicating in whatever form of communication is best for them. Sacks, as we discussed earlier, is a strong advocate of native sign language--American Sign Language (ASL). Their points of emphases are different, but the different approaches provide a broader framework from which hearing people can learn about the deaf community.

Meadows presents an outline of the degrees of hearing loss. For example, a child with a hearing loss that is "80 decibels is

²⁹ Meadows, 1.

³⁰ Ibid.

considered profoundly hard-of-hearing...and with a hearing loss from 60 to less than 80 decibels is considered to be severely deaf to hard-of-hearing."³¹ Children who have various levels of hearing loss, like hearing children, are not the same in terms of their abilities and creativity. Each child has a different personality and gifts to offer.

Another important factor in development is when the child becomes deaf. Children who become deaf after the acquisition of language have greater language understanding than those who become deaf before acquiring verbal language skills. If a child has already learned to speak, then she or he is familiar with the language structure and nuances that are particular to spoken language.

Meadows explores the few studies that analyze modes of communication. How children learn to communicate, through oral and/or signed communication, affects how they will communicate later. This, in turn, affects how educators can learn to effectively communicate with deaf children. For example, if the child benefits from fingerspelling and oralism, then these forms of communication should be used.

The following studies are examples of research in the area of linguistic competence in the school environment of deaf children. Two studies were performed by S. P. Quigley. In one study he compared children who were taught the Rochester Method of simultaneous speech and fingerspelling with children who only used

³¹ Ibid., 15.

the oral method of communication. Quigley's subjects consisted of 32 children. The linguistic tests showed that the children exposed to fingerspelling had better speechreading ability and higher reading scores. Also, the study revealed that their written language ability was higher in most of the categories tested.³²

In the second study, Quigley involved more than 200 students from six residential schools. (A residential school is where the children live and study.) Within the various schools, some students were exposed to speech and fingerspelling and others were taught through speech and manual communication. (Fingerspelling is the use of the fingers to spell a word letter by letter, and manual communication involves fingerspelling and hand signs.) As in the other study, the children who were taught through fingerspelling scored higher on language ability than the children who used a combination of hand signs and fingerspelling.³³

Learning linguistic skills visually is an alternate way of learning how to communicate. This form of communication is found among ASL signers. In the studies of this form of communication, parents who are deaf and use ASL to communicate with their deaf children, provide children with a form of "linguistic socialization which is visual rather than auditory."³⁴ This aids children in

³² S. P. Quigley, The Influence of Fingerspelling on the Development of Language, Communication, and Educational Achievement in Deaf Children (Urbana: University of Illinois, Institute for Research on Research on Exceptional Children, 1969), 90.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Meadows, 42.

developing language skills. On the other hand, parents who use oral-only forms of communication find that the children's development of language skills is slow and sometimes quite painful.³⁵ This leads to the conclusion that deaf children can learn more diverse methods of communication, and the purely oral method is the least adequate.

In terms of cognitive development, Meadows raises the issue of comparative intelligence scores of deaf and hearing children. Like other researchers, she points out that deaf children often score in the normal range. At the same time, the mean intelligence scores are often lower, but this is affected by how the test is administered. The child begins at a disadvantage if the test instructions are not communicated effectively. For example, if the person giving the test does not communicate in the way the child has been taught, then following directions may be difficult. Hans Furth has also pointed this out in his research with deaf children.³⁶

Meadows also explores the historical role that religion has played in shaping the ways persons have thought about deaf persons. She outlines the four perspectives that people have used throughout the centuries to explain deafness. These perspectives are: (1) the biblical belief in the subhuman status of deaf persons; (2) the Greek belief in the social inferiority of persons with any type of disability; (3) the Christian belief that all humanity is equal in

³⁵ Meadows, 43.

³⁶ Furth, Thinking Without Language, 71.

God's sight; and (4) the scientific belief that deafness was caused by a natural condition of society which was beyond the deaf person's control or will.³⁷

In spite of the negative view held by some religious groups about deaf persons, some examples of positive church involvement with the deaf can be found. Meadows highlights the role that the church has played in educating deaf children. The church first provided education for rich deaf children and, eventually, this expanded to include the education of deaf children from various economic backgrounds. As in Sacks' book, Meadows discusses how Abbe Sicard and Pedro Ponce de Leon were advocates and leaders in the field of religious education for the deaf.

Meadows emphasizes the need for family connection and often refers to the parents' role throughout the book. Support from the family and the parents' interest are important according to Meadows. She is supportive of whatever means of communication will work to help the child develop cognitively, linguistically, socially, and psychologically.

Meadows also points out how people have viewed work with deaf persons as mission work. A condescending mentality is not helpful, however. Deaf children are part of our society and should not be viewed as a needy group outside of society's norm. As she notes, the mission mentality was pushed by the church. Meadows sees hope for the deaf children of today in spite of the many obstacles. She believes that signed-English and ASL are acceptable ways of

³⁷ Meadows, 159.

communicating with deaf children if they contribute to family communication. Meadows does not validate only one method; she urges that parent-child communication should be what is the most comfortable for the parent and child in learning together. Meadows even states, "The ease of parent-child communication, the increased possibilities for pleasure in parent-child interaction, should take precedence over any possible suggestion of signed-English for later educational achievement."³⁸

Another good resource which gives a broader perspective on the history of deaf people in America is Deaf Heritage by Jack R. Gannon. This book is written in narrative form. The book covers a variety of topics from religion to entertainment. Illustrations are drawn from various periods of time. For example, there is a list which includes milestones in sports as well as pictures of athletes from schools for the deaf and from professional teams.³⁹

Gannon gives detailed information concerning how the various faith communities have responded to the religious and educational needs of deaf persons. Gannon reviews and analyzes this material in chronological order. For example, he begins with the Episcopal Church because Episcopalians pioneered the development of materials and programs for deaf persons. Next, he examines the Lutherans, Methodists, Latter Day Saints, Baptists, Jews, and Roman Catholics.

Gannon presents information regarding the many achievements of

³⁸ Ibid., 184.

³⁹ Jack R. Gannon, Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America (Silver Spring, Md.: National Association of the Deaf, 1981), 272-376.

deaf persons. These achievements include the first deaf pilot, the first school for deaf African American children, the first deaf basketball player, and the first deaf, ordained minister. He even lists ordained, deaf ministers within the United States.⁴⁰

Gannon's book is entertaining and educational. One section presents humorous anecdotes in which Gannon includes Roy Holcomb's list of "funny, embarrassing and absurd incidents" which have happened to deaf people.⁴¹ For example, "You smack your lips while eating and then wonder why all at once you seem to be a very popular guy, with everyone looking in your direction."⁴² This is a sample of a funny incident in which both deaf and hearing people can see themselves.

Unlike to most of the resources about deafness, Gannon's historical narrative does highlight information about deafness among African Americans. The involvement of African Americans in the education of deaf African Americans in the United States is discussed. For example, Gannon explains that after the "Civil War schools for the deaf and black children began to slowly emerge. In 1863 North Carolina...became the first state to provide an institution for this race."⁴³ Within the next ten years, other states established schools for deaf African Americans.

Although Gannon's book gives a excellent overview of the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 441-42.

⁴¹ Ibid., 209.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 4.

history of deaf people in the United States, one of its limitations is that it does not provide examples or narrative information about various racial groups within the deaf community. This is not uncommon in writing about deafness. Most studies have been focused on the impact of deafness on white children and adults.

African Americans and Deafness

A good resource which addresses African Americans and deafness is Black and Deaf in America by Ernest Hairston and Linwood Smith. The authors note that "approximately two million Blacks have a hearing impairment serious enough to require special medical or educational services. Of this two million approximately 22,000 are profoundly deaf."⁴⁴ This is a larger number of hearing impaired African American children and adults than is generally assumed. Hairston and Smith discuss issues related to deafness among African Americans, such as social isolation, unemployment, lack of educational and vocational skills, and racism, which is present both in society and in the deaf community. Hairston and Smith emphasize that deaf African American children need to receive a good education. Their education should include learning academic skills, social and interpersonal skills, and vocational skills. By receiving an education which encourages them to think, express their thoughts, and interact socially with others, the children will be better prepared in life.

In addition to racism, other research has shown that because

⁴⁴ Ernest Hairston and Linwood Smith, Black and Deaf in America (Silver Spring, Md.: T. J. Publishers, 1983), 9.

of racism, education and job opportunities for African American have been poor. For example, researchers Glenn B. Anderson and Frank B. Bowe cite the scarcity of literature concerning "race problems, the socio-economic and educational problems."⁴⁵ Hairston and Smith also discuss how the African American deaf in general have problems with underemployment because of "race and attitudinal" problems that people have towards them.⁴⁶ Like the general African American population, deaf African Americans must face problems associated with racism, unemployment, and economic stability; however, because they cannot hear, these problems may impact on them with greater force.

Another area of concern has been the lack of attention that hearing African Americans have paid to the needs of deaf African Americans. Anderson and Bowe note that hearing African Americans must not forget about the needs of the deaf in their own community. Fighting for civil and political rights for deaf African Americans must be broader than for the hearing population.⁴⁷ Hairston and Smith also note how the burden of being black in this society creates many problems. It is a double burden to be black and deaf because we live in a society that is "hearing" and "color-conscious."⁴⁸ Unlike many whites, deaf African Americans do not

⁴⁵ Glenn B. Anderson and Frank G. Bowe, "Racism Within the Deaf Community," American Annals of the Deaf 117, no. 6 (December 1972): 619.

⁴⁶ Hairston and Smith, 2.

⁴⁷ Anderson and Bowe, 617.

⁴⁸ Hairston and Smith, 3.

have access to quality educational, social, and occupational opportunities. Although more opportunities are opening up now, there is still need for the African American community and the broader community to become more inclusive.

The need for deaf children to communicate among themselves and with adults about what it means to be black and deaf is a critical point. This type of dialogue would help them to understand what barriers and opportunities are present. Black deaf children need a good education which will help them learn about both of their cultures--deaf and black. Learning in such areas as science, art, mathematics, reading, and developing their communication skills will prepare them to live in and challenge this society. Also, the children need to learn as much as possible about how to deal with societal barriers so that they will not let the barriers become stumbling blocks. These barriers can create and reinforce stereotypes that deaf people have about themselves. Hairston and Smith suggest that deaf black children need to ask themselves, "Are we really different?"⁴⁹ The answer to the question is, "Yes, there is a difference."

As with any community, not all black deaf people suffer from social isolation, lack of educational and job opportunities, limited communication skills, or lack of everyday living skills. The black deaf community has persons who have been given support and who have faced challenges which have become building blocks for them. Both deaf and hearing persons can make a difference in the

⁴⁹ Hairston and Smith, 3.

hearing and skin color consciousness of society, giving strength and internal support to a community that is oppressed.

At the same time, a strength or gift that deaf African American children may have is the ability to exist in two worlds. African American children must begin learning at an early age how to live in more than one world. Learning how to live in the deaf community and the hearing community becomes an added challenge for deaf African American children. For example, skill in bilingual communication has become an important tool within this society. Learning sign and standard English gives the child the opportunity to learn two different styles of communicating.

Another tool that deaf children have is the ability to read body language and facial expressions. Learning how to interpret what others want to express by decoding their non-verbal expressions, equip deaf children with an everyday tool that helps them figure out what others really mean. Deaf African American children need to learn these skills at an early age as part of their development. These children can learn such survival skills if people are willing to take the time to help them. Eventually these skills can be shared with others who struggle to exist in a society that has a very narrow view of who and what is considered acceptable.

The church must continue to challenge and fight for the rights of all African Americans. As a leader, the church can fight in the civil rights struggle, offering a place for a person to feel like somebody; it is the place to learn about the love of God and

Christ. Since the church continues to be a focal point to which many organizations and people turn for assistance, the black church can make a difference. Various churches have broadened their ministry to include deaf persons. Meeting the spiritual, social, and economic needs of the deaf community is a way for the church to live its biblical mission to spread the gospel.

Hopefully, in the near future, different issues about deafness among African Americans will be more widely discussed in the literature, and the media will increase the visibility of people of color within the deaf population. Although the society in general has separated and/or ignored persons who are deaf, changes are slowly taking place that will open the ears of those who can hear. Television programs, movies, sign language books and video tapes, and the recent media coverage of a successful student protest at Gallaudet University for a deaf president are helping to bridge the communication gap between the non-hearing and the hearing.

Religious Response to Deafness

Developing religious education materials for children who are deaf calls us to reexamine a theological issue--being created in the image of God. The image of God should not be circumscribed by one particular understanding that limits who is acceptable. As Christians, we proclaim that God created all persons; therefore, God's handiwork is in all persons.

In the Jewish faith, berakha is the prayer that Jewish persons should repeat when they see a dwarf or a deformed person. The following words are to be recited: "Barukh...meshaneh haberiyot,

Praised are You, O Lord our God, ruler of the universe, who has created such variety among his creatures."⁵⁰ Rabbi Harold Kushner, was once critical of this prayer as not being compassionate toward others: "This phrasing struck me as insensitive to the feelings of deformed and handicapped people. It seemed to respond to the deformity, not to the person; whereas the handicapped want and need to be seen as people, not freaks or walking ailments."⁵¹ Later, Kushner began to understand the berakhah differently. For Kushner, the berakhah did not mean "look how different that person is....(instead it means) despite his different appearance, he too is fashioned in the image of God."⁵² Sometimes we all need to be reminded that we are not perfect regardless of the normality of our physical and mental states. Each of us is made in the image of God, so we all have the imago dei as part of who we are.

The one that recites the berakhah on seeing a deformed person is, in effect, saying to himself, "Were it not for the reminder of this berakhah, I might respond to him with disgust or pity. But now I am reminded to see him as bearing God's image."⁵³

Much more attention needs to be given to the recognition that deaf persons are created in the image of God, especially since negative religious practices and beliefs about deaf persons have fostered misinformation and prejudices about deafness. At the same

⁵⁰ Harold S. Kushner, "A Word From the Editor," Conservative Judaism 36, no. 4 (Summer 1983): n.p.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

time, it was the religious community which began to respond to the educational needs of the deaf in addition to their religious needs. From the middle 1800s to the early 1920s, various denominations began to broaden their ministries to include the religious needs of the deaf. Thomas Gallaudet, the oldest son of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet (cofounder of the American School for the Deaf), started a Sunday School for deaf people in New York City. Gallaudet eventually became an Episcopal priest and founded the first Episcopal church for deaf worshippers--St. Ann's. He is also credited with being the "originator of sign language in religious services for the deaf."⁵⁴ The second church within the Episcopal denomination for deaf worshippers was All Soul's Church in Philadelphia. The pastor of the church, Henry W. Style, was the first deaf person to be ordained as an Episcopal priest.⁵⁵

The first Lutheran church for deaf worshippers was Our Saviour Lutheran Church which was begun in 1896 in Chicago. The second Lutheran Church for the deaf was organized two years later in Milwaukee as Emmanuel Lutheran Church. Lutheran congregations sponsor at least 14 missions to deaf persons and provide ongoing support for these programs.⁵⁶

The Church of the Latter Day Saints also became involved in addressing the religious concerns of the deaf. A Sunday School class was started in Salt Lake City in 1891, and in 1896 another

⁵⁴ Gannon, 181.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 188.

class was organized in Ogden, Utah. In 1917, the Church of the Latter Day Saints chose Max W. Woodbury to serve as the presiding elder of the Ogden Branch for the Deaf, which had a chapel, a recreation hall, and rooms for the classes."⁵⁷

The Methodists also became involved in the religious needs of the deaf, establishing their first church for deaf persons in Chicago. Phillip J. Habenstab became the first deaf person ordained by the Methodist Church. In 1896 the Christ Methodist Church in Baltimore was started, and in 1910 the Cameron Methodist Church in Cincinnati was begun--both serving the deaf.⁵⁸

The Baptists also became involved in the ministry of deaf persons. "While the Episcopalians were building strength in the major cities in the East, and the Lutherans were moving West, the Baptists emerged and began heading South."⁵⁹ In 1906, John W. Michaels was appointed by the Southern Baptist Convention to respond to the spiritual dynamics within the deaf community. Michaels was a very enthusiastic man who called attention to the religious needs of the 45,000 deaf persons in this country.⁶⁰ He had travelled throughout the country to organize Sunday Schools for the deaf. Michaels founded the Southern Baptist Ministry to the Deaf (SBMD) in 1906 and recruited volunteers to assist him in his

⁵⁷ Gannon, 189.

⁵⁸ Jerome D. Schein, At Home Among Strangers (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 1989), 53.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 190.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

efforts. In his travels, "Michael's was not concerned whether the church was of the Baptist denomination, so he set up Sunday Schools and congregations in Methodist and Presbyterian churches."⁶¹ Various publications on signing were published by the Southern Baptist Ministry to the Deaf, and in 1923 Michaels "completed a Handbook of Sign Language of the Deaf to assist ministers, laymen, seminary students, and others interested in working with deaf people."⁶² His tireless and dedicated efforts encouraged deaf and hearing persons to work with the deaf and hearing communities to meet the spiritual needs of the deaf.

For centuries, Catholicism has been active in addressing the educational and religious needs of deaf people. For example, "Catholic Deaf people have had signed masses since eighteenth century France...."⁶³ The monks as previously noted, were among the first educators and advocates for the deaf in Europe. Yet, in the United States, while other denominations had ordained ministers within their respective denominations, the Roman Catholic Church did not do the same. An editorial comment appeared in the October 1912 issue of the Ephpheta which was published monthly for the deaf Catholic parishioners, stating: "It is always interesting to note the activity of other churches in behalf of deaf members of their persuasions. Thus the Episcopalians have ordained 18 deaf ministers, the Lutherans, six; the Methodists, four; and Baptists,

⁶¹ Schein, 53.

⁶² Gannon, 190.

⁶³ Schein, 53.

one."⁶⁴ Finally in 1977, Thomas Coughlin, the first prelingual Catholic priest, was ordained.

In Europe, religious education in Hebrew for Jewish deaf children was provided in four countries: In "Holland, Germany (1843), England (1750's) and Austria (1844)...the concepts of Judaic, Jewish ideas, and man's duty to God and the Ten Commandments were taught."⁶⁵ Religious education for Jewish deaf children in Austria was based on the belief that the children did not lack the ability to learn. The educator Dr. Deutsch of Austria believed that Jewish deaf children had the same abilities in learning as Jewish hearing children.⁶⁶

Religious education and other forms of religious activities for Jewish children and adults in the United States were prevalent in New York City. In New York City, religious classes and services were held at the Fanwood Institute, Temple of Beth Israel, Temple Emmanuel, and the Communal Center for the Jewish Deaf. A large number of Jewish deaf persons attended these various classes and services throughout the early part of the 1900s.

The Mosaic code, which had interpreted disabilities as a punishment from God, created barriers. Further, the spoken Word of God could not be heard or repeated by persons who could not hear and could not speak. This caused problems for how deaf persons (who could not speak) would be accepted or included within the

⁶⁴ Gannon, 191.

⁶⁵ Schuart, Signs in Judaism, xiii.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Jewish culture. (This belief was strongly present within the Christian faith as well.) The idea of not having any type of blemish as a requirement for serving as a spokesperson for God was eventually challenged by Alton Silver. Unfortunately, Silver, who was to enter Hebrew Union College, died unexpectedly.⁶⁷ Since Silver's untimely death, there have been deaf rabbis. "The three known hearing impaired and deaf rabbis...are Rabbi David Rabinowitz, Rabbi Fred Friedman...and Daniel Grossman...."⁶⁸

As in other faith groups, deaf Jewish persons began forming various groups to meet their religious and educational needs. Eventually, the National Congress of Jewish Deaf (NCJD) was formed in 1956. Various Jewish leaders involved in the life of deaf persons in the United States came together to form this organization "to foster Judaism among the Jewish deaf and establish a national organization."⁶⁹ The NCJD is very active and has various responsibilities, including a quarterly newsletter, an NCJD Archives, and an NCJD Hall of Fame which honors persons for their achievements within the Jewish deaf community. In 1977, the World Organization of Jewish Deaf was organized to broaden and strengthen Judaism among those persons in the Jewish deaf community.

The history of religious response to the deaf community throughout the centuries has not always reflected love and concern for those who are different from the norm. Yet, the religious

⁶⁷ Gannon, 191.

⁶⁸ Schuart, xv.

⁶⁹ Ibid., xiv.

community has persevered, trying to address the spiritual needs of the deaf. Hopefully, the religious community will continue to make positive changes to respond more fully to deaf persons, religiously and educationally.

Part Two: Liberation Educators: Paulo
Freire and Nannie H. Burroughs

Chapter 3

Why Freire and Burroughs?

Why choose Paulo Freire and Nannie H. Burroughs? Why turn to them for insight in the education of African American children who are hearing impaired? There are several reasons. Both Freire and Burroughs represent the tradition of talented, caring, and dedicated educators who opened doors for people closed out from education--e.g., Benjamin E. Mays, former president of Morehouse College (Atlanta), author, scholar, and civil rights leader; and Mary McLeod Bethune, president and founder of Bethune-Cookman College (Daytona Beach), civil rights activist, and orator.

Freire and Burroughs offer educational theories and practices which are unique. First, Freire and Burroughs are educators who emphasize liberation, freedom, and justice. These concepts are important to the education of oppressed people. Freire's advocacy of liberation and justice is highlighted in Dennis Goulet's introduction to Freire's Education for Critical Consciousness:

Education in the Freire mode is the practice of liberty because it frees the educator no less than the educatees from the twin thralldom of silence and monologue. Both partners are liberated as they begin to learn, the one to know self as a being of worth-notwithstanding the stigma of illiteracy, poverty, or technological ignorance-and the other as capable of dialogue in spite of the strait jacket imposed by the role of educator as one who knows.¹

Burroughs' push for liberation, freedom, and justice was expressed throughout her life as she advocated for the rights of African

¹ Dennis Goulet, introduction to Education for Critical Consciousness, by Paulo Freire (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), viii-ix.

American people and the rights of African American women in particular. Like many educators in her day, Burroughs emphasized the self-help "ideology for black Americans to support and help themselves in the establishment and growth of their institutions, despite the severe limitations imposed upon them by segregation and discrimination."² (During Burroughs' time, the word Negro was used. This dissertation uses the term African American or black unless directly quoting a source.)

A second common aspect of these two educators is their active construction of alternative educational models. Freire constructed a critical pedagogy for people to learn how to read for their own liberation, and Burroughs emphasized the importance of African Americans doing for themselves (self-help) and racial pride. She was determined to insure that girls and women would receive a good academic and vocational education, and she was dedicated to breaking away from the stereotypical roles of girls and women in academic and career choices. These important elements of the educational models of Freire and Burroughs will be examined here.

Like Freire, Burroughs developed her own educational program to fight against the injustices and dehumanizing structures of oppression. She organized, planned, and opened the National Training School for Women and Girls to help prepare women and girls for careers and to cope with various problems that women of color

² "A Brief Biographical Sketch," [paper on Nannie H. Burroughs] photocopy, Nannie H. Burroughs School, Washington, D.C., n.d., 5.

experience. The idea for the school came to Burroughs after she was denied a job. Earl Harrison relates Burroughs' thoughts on the school in his book The Dream and the Dreamer:

An idea struck out of the suffering of the disappointment that I would some day have a school here in Washington that school politics had nothing to do with, and that would give all sorts of girls a fair chance, without political pull, to help them overcome whatever handicaps they might have. It came to me like a flash of light, and I knew I was to do that thing when the time came. But I couldn't do it yet, so I just put the idea away in the back of my head and left it there.³

A third mark of educational uniqueness is that Freire and Burroughs both wanted to develop a creative and healthy sense of self-esteem and pride within people. Freire has done this by assisting persons to develop critical thinking skills through reading. He has challenged people to think critically by helping them to ask questions related to their social, economic, and class status. Burroughs did this by encouraging persons to help themselves by receiving a good education and by developing skills and a trade; she also guided girls and women to believe in themselves intellectually and vocationally. Freire and Burroughs were both considered troublemakers--the former because he wanted the poor to take charge of their lives and to challenge the status quo, and the latter because she was African American, a woman, and a challenger to the status quo regarding racial, economical, and gender issues.

Freire's and Burroughs' determination and love for others are

³ Earl Harrison, The Dream and the Dreamer (Washington, D.C.: Nannie H. Burroughs, 1956), 10.

reflected in their lives and work. Both have challenged oppressive structures that are perpetuated by both the oppressors and the oppressed. In challenging the educational systems through their innovative educational practices, Freire and Burroughs hoped to create healthier and more humane social structures that contribute to healthier lives for people. Their work to help others develop positive self-images and pride of self, race, and culture reflects a number of important themes which can be included in developing a religious education program for African American hearing impaired children.

Fourth, Freire and Burroughs both pose educational theories and practices that are supported by their strong Christian faith. This strong belief in God and how God is actively involved in our lives is an important element in shaping religious education also. African American deaf children need to know that God has not abandoned them. Freire and Burroughs are advocates of liberation, freedom, and justice that are grounded in their Christianity, and their beliefs can speak to African American hearing impaired children who are disenfranchised because of race, disability, and gender.

This section briefly outlines a few of the religious beliefs which form the framework of their particular educational models. Paulo Freire is a Christian, a Catholic, and a humanist. Freire's Christian and Catholic roots are expressed in his understanding of human beings.

Man is essentially defined by his relationship to God,
who has given him the powers of reflective and free

choice....For Freire, man must struggle to become what he already is by virtue of the essence he has been given by God.⁴

Freire is also known as a Christian humanist. He thinks of himself as a humanist and calls his philosophy and method humanistics.⁵ Becoming more fully human is what Freire believes humanity is to strive for. Those who oppress others take away the opportunity for others to become more fully human. Humanization, according to Freire, is "man's vocation," but humanization "is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressor."⁶

Burroughs' strong Christian faith is evidenced throughout her work, writings, and speeches. For example, her school offered educational and religious discipline. This is best expressed in the maxim "Cleanliness is next to Godliness which found expression in the school creed of the three B's--the Bible, the bath, the broom: Clean life, clean body, clean home."⁷ Burroughs stressed these throughout the school's curriculum.

Freire and Burroughs both believe that God's purpose for every human being is not to be defined by destructive and dehumanizing structures. Each calls into question the oppression found in their

⁴ John Elias, Conscientization and Deschooling: Freire's and Illich's Proposals for Reshaping Society (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 37-38.

⁵ Ibid., 37.

⁶ Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 28.

⁷ "A Brief Biographical Sketch," 6.

respective societies. Each reflects on how oppressed persons perpetuate this oppression and how they can break these chains of bondage. Freire's radicalism examines all aspects of human activity and all institutions of society from the perspective of whether or not true humanization is given the opportunity to develop.⁸ Burroughs strongly advocates that African Americans individually and collectively must not allow society to dictate what they cannot do. She wrote a pamphlet entitled, Twelve Things the Negro Must Do For Himself. In this pamphlet, one of the twelve things reflects her belief of how God helps persons, but the persons must also help themselves. Burroughs states,

The Negro Must Stop Expecting God and White Folk To Do For Him What He Can Do For Himself....The Negro will have to do exactly what Jesus told the man (in John 5:8) to do- Carry his own load- Take up your bed and walk.⁹

Burroughs also believes that girls and women should not see themselves as helpless creatures. Her motto at the school reads, "'We specialize in the wholly impossible' and she sought the 'highest development of Christian womanhood' through curricula designed to train Negro women to be self-sufficient wage-earners as well as 'expert homemakers.'"¹⁰ Burroughs does not want women to become creatures dependent on men to take care of them.

Burroughs believes in the Christian concepts of evil and sin

⁸ Elias, 40.

⁹ Nannie H. Burroughs, Twelve Things the Negro Must Do for Himself and Twelve Things White Folks Must Stop Doing to the Negro (Washington, D.C.: Nannie H. Burroughs Publications, 1968), 5.

¹⁰ "A Brief Biographical Sketch," 5.

which contribute to oppressive societies. Freire does not address this explicitly in his writings, but he is explicit about injustice and oppression. Each believes that freedom from the oppressive structures lies within the oppressed people. Neither is willing to concede that oppressed people are not capable of taking their freedom and living it out to the fullest. Their strong belief in God's not wanting any people to be limited in their freedom or full humanity propels their understanding and hard work for freedom and justice.

Although Burroughs appears to advocate that only individuals can bring change, her self-help philosophy also contributes to group growth because each person is doing her or his best to help others as well. Like Burroughs, Freire believes that the collective body of people can bring about a change as the individuals in the group begin to take charge of their own lives. Freire encourages and advocates the collective "we" working together as opposed to the "I." Although each person must make a conscious choice as to what she or he will do and how it will be done of the group, it is because and for the group that the choices are made. Freire's understanding of human nature is interwoven with this belief. He even cautions against the oppressed becoming like the oppressors and oppressing the oppressors. Freire writes in Pedagogy of the Oppressed that "the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers

of the humanity of both."¹¹

Freire's and Burroughs' vision and their efforts to create a more just society through education reflect important themes that reappear throughout the history of education. Both persons are liberators and freedom fighters. Both Freire and Burroughs believe that God is actively involved with humanity and wants us not to dehumanize one another. They have contributed to education by encouraging people to think critically and develop positive images of themselves and their race and culture; their work provides valuable resources for the liberation of all humanity.

¹¹ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 28.

CHAPTER 4

Paulo Freire

In this chapter Freire's life and concept of pedagogy will be explored. To understand his view of the learning process, an example of the literacy program he designed will be presented. Also a critique of Freire's educational work will be offered.

Biographical Background

A brief biographical sketch of Paulo Freire begins with Freire's birth in Recife, Brazil in 1921.¹ At an early age, Freire experienced the ugliness of poverty. The depression of 1929 hit his family hard and he was unable to keep up with his schoolwork. This led some teachers to think he was mentally retarded. Freire promised himself that he would do something one day to help bring change for the better to poor persons where he lived.

He began to fulfill his vow by studying law and philosophy at the University of Pernambuco. He worked as a labor union lawyer for people in the slums. Through his work in the slums, he became involved in literacy training. From 1947 to 1959, literacy education for adults became his main area of interest, and this continued even after he was appointed professor of history and philosophy of education at the University of Recife in 1959.

Freire became involved in various reform movements throughout northeast Brazil during the 1960s. Rural and urban farm workers' unions were formed during this time. They had effective strikes

¹ Richard Shaull, foreword to Pedagogy of the Oppressed, by Paulo Freire, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 10.

which resulted in farmers' receiving better treatment and wages. Freire was also involved in the Popular Culture Movement "which was an attempt to democratize the culture through discussions on such themes as nationalism, remission of profits, development, and literacy."² This group, with the farm workers' unions, helped to organize workers to strike against their working and living conditions. These strikes proved successful.

Freire developed a literacy program that proved quite satisfactory. He worked with various organizations, and eventually his program was adopted by the nation. Conservative groups criticized his methods, and opposition to his methods grew. Military conflict in 1964 brought an abrupt end to his program. He was jailed and stripped of his citizenship. In prison he wrote about his literacy method. After he was released from prison, Freire and his family went to Chile, and he finished writing his book Educacao como Pratica da Liberdade.³ In Chile, a bureau for adult education was to be established with Freire as the director, but this did not materialize.

The Harvard University Center for the Study of Education and Development and the Center for the Study of Development and Social Change extended Freire an invitation to study at the Center. He went to Harvard University in 1969. In 1970 he went to Geneva to work as special consultant with the World Council of Churches. He also lectured in the United States and wrote books and articles.

² Elias, 13.

³ Ibid., 12.

In 1973, Freire established an institute in Geneva so that he could continue developing his philosophy and train people from around the world to use his methods.

Freire's Understanding of
the Learning Process

This section on Freire's theory of learning analyzes his understanding of the learning process within the following framework: (1) The Social and Political Context, (2) Conscientizacao/Conscientization, (3) The Banking Concept, (4) Problem-Posing, (5) Dialogical Action. In the next section, an example of Freire's pedagogy will be presented.

Freire states quite clearly that the social and political significance of education is an important dynamics that must be addressed. The oppressive conditions in the Latin American and Brazilian society, in particular, are the sources from which Freire draws his knowledge of what education should be. The socio-cultural and socio-political reality of Brazil was the context in which Freire first set forth a process of literacy education to transform the oppressive structures. By socio-cultural I mean the collective rituals, myths, beliefs, values, and behavior of the people; these, according to Freire, are interconnected with social and cultural injustices in a hierarchial structure. The working definition of socio-political in this dissertation refers to structures and dynamics of power which control decisions for a people and their country, economically, educationally, and socially. Freire believes that oppressive social and political

structures must be challenged and transformed. Critical thinking which questions, challenges, and demands change is what Freire believes to be essential in the educational process. The people need to understand how the society really functions, as opposed to blindly accepting what the leadership has to say.

Paulo Freire's theory of learning is grounded in his understanding of conscientizacao/conscientization. (The word conscientization is "based on the Brazilian word conscientizacao."⁴ The English spelling will be used throughout this dissertation unless otherwise noted.) The word conscientizacao was not coined by Freire. During a roundtable meeting of professors at the Brazilian Institute in 1964, the term conscientizacao was born. This term gave Freire the basis for understanding education as an aspect of freedom in which the act of knowing can be a crucial tool in learning how to deal with reality.⁵

Paulo Freire's approach to developing a liberating educational model begins with his understanding of his particular Latin American/Brazilian socio-cultural and socio-political framework. From Freire's viewpoint, an effective liberating educational process, must be directly related to the socio-cultural and socio-political realities in the society. He describes "cultural action and conscientization" as the way that liberating education

⁴ Elias, 106.

⁵ Ibid., 132.

addresses socio-cultural attitudes and ideas.⁶ Freire explains the socio-political nature of education as the "process of political literacy" and "education for political literacy."⁷ Freire also addresses throughout his work the social and political framework and the socio-economics of his culture.

The Social and Political Context

This section begins with Freire's socio-cultural picture of the Latin American/Brazilian society. Paulo Freire worked within a very repressive Brazilian society. The resistance to decreasing the gap between the poor and the landowners and those benefitting from industrial growth was very evident. In 1964, the government of Joao Goulart was overthrown because he wanted to make changes in the economic structures of the country.⁸ Gary McEoin, an observer of the Latin American experience remarked in the 1970's that:

Alarmed by the growing gap between the impoverished rural Northeast and the industrialized South, the former presidents, Quadros and Goulart, favored projects to correct that situation....It [the government] proclaimed goals of land redistribution, economic nationalism, nationalization of large sectors of production, political mobilization of the urban and rural masses, and internal neutralism and nonalignment. This, in turn, frightened the policy makers of the United States and, with official encouragement, a coalition of politicians, businessmen,

⁶ Paulo Freire, Cultural Freedom for Action (Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review and Center for the Study of Development of Social Change, 1970), 27.

⁷ Paulo Freire, The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation, trans. Donald Macedo (South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey, 1985), 101, 104.

⁸ Esther Arias and Mortimer Arias, The Cry of My People (New York: Friendship Press, 1980), 63.

and the military, overthrew President Goulart in 1964.⁹

The new regime wanted to ensure that the people would not be encouraged to revolt or to make changes in the present government's way of doing things. If the people were challenged to think for themselves and to become critical of what was happening, then the government would lose control of their lives. Therefore, the "whole process of stirring up the people had to be stopped."¹⁰ The intellectual leaders and others who could help guide the people to thinking critically and acting upon their hopes for a better life were either exiled or wiped out. Such persons as Francisco Juliao and his peasant leagues were eliminated; Celso Furtado, an economist, and Paulo Freire had their citizenship rights taken from them and were exiled.¹¹

The new regime terrorized and tortured people who did not conform to their oppressive ways. Esther and Mortimer Arias note that various organizations--student groups, workers' organizations, and political parties--had to run their operations underground.¹² According to Esther and Mortimer Arias, "the military regime was caught on a treadmill, trying to reconcile its policies of economic modernization with the preservation of political and social

⁹ Gary McEoin, The Revolution Next Door (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), 184.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Arias and Arias, 65.

immobility. It decided to increase repression."¹³

The repression and torture of persons who dared to criticize or challenge the military regime became widespread throughout the countryside. Leaders, who represented the masses, called for freedom from the torture and repression that the people were suffering. The social, political, and economic stronghold that a few persons appeared to have was deeply embedded into the whole structure of the Latin American countries in general. Freire's homeland of Brazil represented only one example of the dehumanizing conditions in which people tried to exist within Latin America. Such countries as Bolivia, Uruguay, Chile, and Argentina were also affected by the repressive and torturous conditions that those in power imposed upon the people.

In order to enforce repressive practices and control the people's lives, various rights of the people were taken away or laws created to punish and kill the people. For example, in 1967 a new law was passed that allowed the president to declare new laws without having to consult with the Congress. Over a hundred people were removed from the Congress and thousands of military personnel were retired.¹⁴ Many persons were also jailed during this time. Esther and Mortimer Arias also state that "Between 1964 and 1969, no fewer than 30,000 persons had been arrested on charges of subversion, and 12,000 of them were jailed but never tried (their average age, including that of women and young girls, was 22

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, 65.

years)." ¹⁵

The call for liberation (human freedom) is stressed throughout the Latin American region. Social, economic, and political freedom are important and necessary, but the quest for humanization, as Freire calls it, is even greater. This belief is articulated by others as well. Gustavo Gutierrez writes in his book, A Theology of Liberation, about the need for the vision of liberation to expand beyond the socio-economic and socio-political structures and needs of the people. He states that "it means, in a deeper sense, to see the becoming of humankind as a process of human emancipation in history." ¹⁶

While many persons may struggle to challenge and make changes within the oppressive rule of Brazil and other Latin American countries, only the persons who are oppressed can authentically make these changes. Throughout his work, Freire emphasized that the oppressed are the ones who must make liberation become a reality from their perspective. Gutierrez supports Freire in this belief. Gutierrez believes that Freire's emphasis on the people as the creators of a pedagogy of the oppressed stresses that an authentic cultural revolution can only be implemented by the people. ¹⁷

The church within the Latin American countries, which has been

¹⁵ Ibid, 67.

¹⁶ Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 56.

¹⁷ Ibid., 57.

an important part of the daily lives of the people, participated in the oppression of the people. The church was quite connected to the established order.¹⁸ At the same time, there have been priests, nuns, and other religious leaders, who have spoken out against the various injustices and cruelty that have been inflicted upon the people and, as a result, have been murdered or tortured.¹⁹ Freire reminds the church that it cannot pretend to remove itself from the present situation because the church responds to contemporary events as well as articulating past beliefs and giving future direction. If true cultural revolution is to come about, the church must be an active participant in helping the people to think critically and actively participate in their liberation. Freire and other liberation fighters realize this and have been willing to challenge the church to do this.

Freire views the socio-cultural environment of the Latin American/Brazilian society as one which is hierarchial in structure and which exploits people through lack of proper medical care, miseducation, low paying jobs, and myths and rituals which perpetuate the cycle of poverty. Freire describes the Latin American societies in his book Cultural Freedom for Action, as

closed societies characterized by a rigid hierarchial social structure;...by a precarious and selective educational system whose schools are an instrument of maintaining the status quo;....²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid., 75.

¹⁹ Ibid., 72.

²⁰ Paulo Freire, Cultural Freedom for Action, 36.

The dominators of the culture continue to feed this system of exploitation and dehumanization by dividing people through a class system and not allowing the wealth and goods of the country to be shared with everyone. Only a select few are allowed to have anything, and the majority of the people are have nots.

The superstructure (the dominators) feeds off of the infrastructure (the dominated) of the culture. It feeds off the infrastructure by designing systems in which the dominated do the hard work and are isolated from the decision-making process--decisions, for example, about what services are good for the people and the economy, what goods should be imported and exported, and how can the educational system work can be made to work with and for the people. People in the infrastructure are not able to make decisions because they live in the shadow of the superstructure. They may think autonomous decisions are being made by the people for the good of the people, but in reality, the dominated are mirroring the choices of the dominator. The dominated are unable to make decisions objectively since they believe that what the dominators have to offer, do, and say is ultimately for the best. Even though they know this is not usually the case, the need to have things and be like the oppressors becomes ingrained in their consciousness. Until the people are willing to exercise their critical thinking ability, speak out, and put their belief into action, they will remain oppressed.

Therefore, a liberating education from Freire's perspective provides a way for the oppressed to begin developing a better sense

of who they are and the power they have to make changes in the system which oppresses them. Critical thinking is an important and necessary tool to change their negative perception of themselves and to challenge the dehumanizing conditions in which they live. Freire writes, "In a humanizing pedagogy the method ceases to be an instrument by which the teachers (...the revolutionary leadership) can manipulate the students (...the oppressed), because it expresses the consciousness of the students themselves."²¹ The consciousness of the people becomes challenged beyond its complacent state. Through critical thinking, Freire encourages people to look at reality and to challenge the myths and rituals that support their understanding of a particular situation.

Often within the Brazilian agrarian culture, farmers will blame themselves or the land for not being productive. Freire would ask the villagers why they think this. The villagers might respond with, "The land is too tired." When Freire would ask why this is so, some of the villagers would say that the rich farmers had fertilizers and they did not. After asking why this is so, Freire would then ask questions which led to topics such as politics, economics, and theology. Freire would challenge the people to think about their answers to questions on the various issues related to the land's non-productivity. Through this dialogue of asking and answering questions, the people began to think for themselves about why the land was not producing and what could be done to change this problem and other related community

²¹ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 55-56.

problems.²² Freire believes that if the people start believing in themselves and their own knowledge and ideas, they will have the power to break the silence that often characterizes the oppressed in this particular society. The silence must be broken so that oppressed persons can live out their full humanity as God intends them to and not live in dehumanizing conditions.

The social reality of education is also presented by describing the domestication of education. This refers to education which divides students and teachers as educatees and educators. Also, the students are encouraged to be passive learners. As passive learners, they are filled with the knowledge of the teacher. Freire writes, "As passive individuals, learners are not invited to participate creatively in the process of their learning; instead they are 'filled' by the educators' words."²³ In this type of educational model, the oppressive nature of the social structures are not recognized. Instead, "these structures are made obscure by different forms of action that reinforce the learners' 'false consciousness'."²⁴ Freire's understanding of the passive role of the learner is also addressed in his book Pedagogy of the Oppressed. He writes that the teacher's task is to "organize a process which already occurs spontaneously, to 'fill' the students

²² James A. Farmer, Jr., "Adult Education for Transiting," in Paulo Freire: A Revolutionary Dilemma for the Adult Educator, ed. Stanley M. Grabowski, Publications in Continuing Education and ERIC Clearinghouse (Syracuse: Syracuse University, 1972), 1.

²³ Freire, The Politics of Education, 101.

²⁴ Ibid., 102.

by making deposits of information which he considers to constitute true knowledge."²⁵

Freire realizes that learning and knowledge are very political.²⁶ John Elias relates in Conscientization and Deschooling that Freire views learning and knowledge as power because those who create it and those who use it can produce power from it.²⁷ Freire believes that educators must question themselves about who they are working for. As educators become more conscious and dedicated to their work, then they will be willing to take risks. In taking risks, they will also be willing to risk their particular jobs. At the same time, educators who are not willing to look at their work critically, and who only want to save their jobs, do not understand the political character of education.²⁸

Freire's understanding of the choices we have to make in life points to the political nature of what we do or do not do. These choices reinforce what we really believe. Freire tells a story of how his decision to work in adult literacy eventually cost him a jail sentence. Helping persons to learn how to read is definitely a political action because learning to read represents access to knowledge, and knowledge is power. For example, during the period of slavery in America it was against the law to teach slaves to

²⁵ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 62-63.

²⁶ Ibid., 138.

²⁷ Elias, 138.

²⁸ Freire, Politics of Education, 180.

read. If the slaves learned to read, they could become as educated as their owners. There was also the possibility of the slaves gaining their freedom by "forging" their own manumission papers or passes to leave the plantation and visit other plantations. Learning to read has been, and always will be, a source of power. As our world becomes increasingly technological, knowing how to read becomes even more important. Persons will need to know and understand the technical language that is spoken and written. For people who cannot understand this language, job opportunities in many fields will not be available.

Education is also related to social issues because social power influences what is taught and how it is taught. Freire analyzes the political illiteracy problem to explain what political literacy means. Freire discusses how a political illiterate is a person who accepts the social reality as something that has already happened and cannot be changed. With this belief, the political illiterate, regardless of whether she or he can read or write, does not see that the social reality is presently in the process of something being made.²⁹

Those persons who do not want to acknowledge education as more than a fact-giving and fact-finding task operate from a naive consciousness perspective. Political illiterates suffer from this and do not interpret their present reality from a realistic perspective. Realism does not shy away from examining the oppressive conditions which limit the way people think. Belief in

²⁹ Freire, Politics of Education, 103.

abstract concepts and universal knowledge does not allow for differences in how one culture thinks about life, nor will the opportunity be present to make changes in an unjust system. Unfortunately, the "more refined the political illiterate's naive consciousness, the more stubborn that person will be when facing a critical comprehension of reality."³⁰

Freire reiterates certain themes in discussing the liberating literacy process. He states that educational controls communicate that thinking is unnecessary for the learner.³¹ The key to understanding political literacy is that there can be no transformation without going beyond domesticating educational methods. These methods limit the potential for students to think for themselves and ensure the teacher's role as the person with all of the knowledge. Political literacy requires that an educator needs to be present with the students, but not be someone set apart from the students. The students and teachers are working together to develop critical thinking skills for liberation. Unlike the domesticating teacher, the "educator for freedom has to die, so to speak, as the exclusive educator of learners, that is, as the one educating them....learners...too (must) die as the exclusive learners of educators so that they can be reborn as real learners...."³²

Liberating education requires a revolutionary process if

³⁰ Ibid., 104.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Freire, Politics of Education, 105.

transformation of the oppressed society is to take place. Through dialogue and the participation of all people, changes can take place.

The creation of this new world, which should never be made 'sacred,' requires the conscious participation of all the people, transcendence of the dichotomy between manual and intellectual labor, and a form of education that does not reproduce the bourgeoisie.³³

In summary, to understand Paulo Freire's theories of learning and their practical application to education, we must understand that Freire writes within a particular socio-cultural and socio-political framework. The social and political nature of the Latin American society is important to think about when reading his work. He writes from a Latin American perspective, with a Brazilian emphasis. The social and political dynamics within any culture are not to be taken lightly. In Freire's work, he is very much aware of the cultural reality of any society. For example, Freire notes in Pedagogy in Process that he had learned in Chile "not to impose on the Chilean context what we had done in different circumstances in Brazil."³⁴ What works as an educational method in one place, may not work in another. Freire is wary of the universal approach that is often taken in education. As Freire explains, "One of our most pressing concerns when we were preparing as a team for our first visit to Guinea-Bissau was to guard against the temptation to overestimate the significance of some aspect of an earlier

³³ Ibid., 106.

³⁴ Paulo Freire, Pedagogy in Process, trans. Carman St. John Hunter (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 9.

experience, giving it universal validity."³⁵ The cultural influences within the society give the impetus from which Freire critiques, creates, and implements, with the assistance of the people, a liberating education program through literacy. Critical thinking by the people is strongly encouraged. He also strongly advocates a "We" perspective and not an "I" perspective. The people, and not one person, are to determine what is good for the community and what the community should reject. With these thoughts in mind, we will begin with Freire's perception of the socio-cultural and the socio-political climate in Latin America and Brazil. Reading Freire's overview of the socio-cultural and socio-political context in Latin America and Brazil provides the reader with the basis from which Freire developed his belief in the need for a liberating educational process. The oppressive structures and their dehumanizing practices cry out for a healthy way to assist people in their struggle for full humanity. The oppressive conditions do not allow for the masses of people to receive a good education or to live above a basic survival level. Becoming a person who is literate, for Freire, means being politically literate, a critical thinker, and able to read and write. As Elias writes of Freire, "For him, to learn or to know something is inseparable from deciding to change it, to preserve it, to destroy it, or to fully experience it as one's own problem."³⁶

³⁵ Ibid., 9-10.

³⁶ Elias, 138.

Conscientizacao/Conscientization

The root of Freire's educational theory is conscientizacao/ conscientization. Conscientization begins with "its agent [who] must be a subject (i.e., a conscious being), conscientization, like education, is specifically and exclusively a human process."³⁷ Conscientization "refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality."³⁸ An individual cannot develop this consciousness by her or himself. Freire emphasizes throughout his work how individuals and the social world are related. The interaction between them gives rise to conscientization. Therefore, the individual cannot reach conscientization without relating to others. The following quote by Freire highlights his belief:

It is as conscious beings that men are not only in the world, but with the world, together with other men. Only men...are able to achieve the complex operation of simultaneously transforming the world by their action and grasping and expressing the world's reality in their creative language.³⁹

As Freire states, "Conscientization... is not an individual, but a social task. It is also never neutral, for the educator has the right to have options, but he must not impose them."⁴⁰ Nor can conscientization be imposed by others onto someone else. Education

³⁷ Freire, Cultural Freedom for Action, 27.

³⁸ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 19.

³⁹ Freire, Cultural Freedom for Action, 27-28.

⁴⁰ Paulo Freire, Education for Critical Consciousness (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 149.

cannot be neutral because it is part of the historical and social context. Education either encourages persons to think critically and take constructive actions which will change the existing oppressive structures, or education helps students to conform to oppression.⁴¹ Therefore, Freire believes that it would be contradictory to expect the oppressors to develop or practice a pedagogy of the oppressed.⁴² Freire stresses how the oppressed must work together to change the oppressive structures which perpetuate the idea that only the elite can think for the oppressed or provide the leadership among the oppressed. Freire states, "The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own conscientizacao."⁴³

There are three levels in Freire's understanding of conscientization. The three levels are intransitive consciousness, naive transitive consciousness, and critical consciousness. These stages of consciousness are related to the cultural-historical superstructure of the Third World and to the Latin American infrastructure. As with any analysis of a particular culture, the analysis may not apply to another culture. Freire has named this study of consciousness within the Latin American reality as a "'culture of silence'...which is a superstructural expression which conditions a special form of consciousness. The culture of silence

⁴¹ Shaul, introduction to Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 15.

⁴² Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 39.

⁴³ Ibid., 54.

overmines the infrastructure in which it originates."⁴⁴ The culture of silence "is not the dominator who controls a culture and imposes it on the dominated. This culture is the result of the structural relations between the dominated and the dominators."⁴⁵

Freire explains how these three levels of consciousness parallel the reality of the dominated societies. Each mode of consciousness that relates to this particular socio-cultural environment has been "historically conditioned by the social structures."⁴⁶

The first mode of consciousness, intransitive, parallels the "concrete reality of dependent societies"⁴⁷ in which consciousness "does not have sufficient distance from reality to objectify it in order to know it in a critical way."⁴⁸ In Paulo Freire's book Cultural Freedom for Action, the first mode of consciousness is intransitive. Freire states that intransitive consciousness is a usual component of a closed, structured society. Persons cannot see that the problems and the facts given to them are not the result of some type of superpower or reality outside of themselves, nor are they the result of something inside of them. Persons in the intransitive state of consciousness are not able to see reality for what it is, and they place the blame or cause for whatever the

⁴⁴ Farmer, 32.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁶ Freire, Cultural Freedom for Action, 36.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Elias, 134.

situation on an "outside objective reality."⁴⁹ In other words, fatalism becomes a natural part of how the people think. They think that they have no control and that something outside of themselves will decide what can or cannot happen. With this type of consciousness, people cannot visualize participating in activities to change a situation that may need to be restructured. Silence and non-participation result. Further, these people often accept negative attitudes as truth because the dominant culture has constantly reinforced them. These negative attitudes are internalized, and the people believe them and act according to what others have prescribed as their behavior. Persons who are at this level of consciousness begin to internalize the negative behavior and beliefs that the dominant culture dictates.⁵⁰ There is also the need to feel dependent on others. The dependency in this mode of consciousness "often expresses itself in defensive and therapeutic magic."⁵¹

The next level of consciousness that Freire discusses is called naive transitive consciousness. He also calls this level popular consciousness. In the naive transitive level of consciousness, questioning the societal structure and the elite becomes part of the thought process. The silence is broken, but only at a naive level.

Elias interprets Freire's understanding of this mode: "A

⁴⁹ Freire, Cultural Freedom for Action, 36.

⁵⁰ Elias, 134.

⁵¹ Ibid., 134.

serious questioning of one's life situation begins, but at a naive and primitive level."⁵² Persons function with a naive understanding of what and how society functions, but the questioning becomes a challenge to those who are dominant, and they must now readjust to the awakening of those who were once silent. This awakening is not powerful enough to shake the oppressive powers loose, but it becomes a starting point for change.

Freire says, "The transitive consciousness emerges as a naive consciousness, dominated as the former. Nevertheless, it is now indisputably more disposed to perceiving the source of its ambiguous existence in the objective conditions."⁵³ For people in a state of transitive consciousness, the lack of control over their lives is not as great as it is in the intransitive consciousness mode. The beginning of some sense of control is risky however: "People begin to sense they have some control over their lives, but the danger of manipulative populist leadership is ever great."⁵⁴

The third level of consciousness is critical consciousness. Freire emphasizes the need for persons to reflect thoroughly on their thoughts and actions and the thoughts and actions of others. He wants people to question and challenge the oppressive and dehumanizing structures which exist within the Latin American society. Critical consciousness involves dialogue. The dialogical

⁵² Ibid., 135.

⁵³ Freire, Cultural Freedom for Action, 38.

⁵⁴ Elias, 135.

process must take place for persons to communicate about problems, solutions, and implementation of these solutions. Freire notes that this level of consciousness is marked by how persons are able to interpret problems with more depth, to experience more confidence in their own contributions to discuss and listen to others, and to accept responsibility.⁵⁵ Critical consciousness requires persons to talk together and not speak only as individuals with their particular needs or concerns. (I understand Freire's critical consciousness to be synonymous with his understanding of critical thinking. Critical thinking is discussed in greater detail under Dialogical Process.) For Freire, dialogue must occur among all persons to transform the oppressive and dehumanizing structures, and not just among a select few. The elite do not and cannot have the only answers to the problems.

Freire's theory of learning is based on his theory of consciousness. Learning is moving from one consciousness level to the next. It also involves the social reality of a given context and the power of the people to change and challenge the socio-cultural reality of their society. Learning starts with evaluating the language, self-concept, worldview, and present conditions of your life situation. Through learning, a step toward critical consciousness is made.⁵⁶ This concept of learning has its basis in the belief that there is an important difference between what has been given in the natural world and the possibility of change in

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Elias, 136.

the social world order.⁵⁷

Paulo Freire views learning as process in motion. It is not static, but a dynamic and vigorous process. He is very much opposed to the banking method of learning. This concept does not allow for students to engage actively in their educational process. The educator is to assist students to analyze, challenge, and think critically about everyday life experiences.

The banking concept. Paulo Freire is a strong advocate of liberation for people through education. Liberation through education is not merely learning facts and figures. Depositing information in students' minds and expecting to withdraw the information on demand is not Freire's idea of education. It is certainly not a form of education for liberation. This method of deposit education is what he calls the banking method of education.⁵⁸ Freire opposes the banking method because in the teacher-student relationship "the teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence."⁵⁹

In his analysis of teacher-student relationships in the banking method of education, Freire describes the narrative character. The narrative "relationship involves a narrating subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 58.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 58-59.

students)." ⁶⁰ Freire does not view this type of relationship as life giving, creative or connected to reality. For example, Freire sees such teachers discussing life as if it came in separate and static pieces. Freire states, "The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable." ⁶¹ If this is not taking place, then students are given topics of information which do not relate to their everyday life experiences. The teacher, Freire explains, has the "task to 'fill' the students with contents of his narration--contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance." ⁶² The distant, empty, and detached words of the teacher to the students become foreign substances which the students are expected to learn, accept, and regurgitate.

This passive act of receiving the information without challenging the teacher makes the student a "better student" and the more a teacher is able to fill-up the "receptacles, the better a teacher he is...", according to Freire. ⁶³ The student is reduced to being an object, an open pitcher or container ready to receive information, but not ready to process, question, or challenge it.

Within this framework, Freire builds his case against the banking method of education. If education becomes an act of

⁶⁰ Ibid., 57.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 58.

depositing, the depositor (teacher) and depositories (students) are not communicating with each other. "Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students receive, memorize, and repeat."⁶⁴ In the banking style of education, "the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filling, and storing the deposits."⁶⁵ According to Freire, the banking style of education, does not allow a person to become fully human because it limits how much one can know and question. Freire states:

For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, men cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.⁶⁶

The banking concept operates from the assumption that the giver of the knowledge is superior to the person receiving the knowledge. Freire best sums this up when he discusses the superior attitude of the teacher and the inferior attitude of the student. The teacher sets up the dichotomy between the teacher and the student. The teacher is the one who has the information to give to the students, but the students have nothing to offer the teacher. Students accept their less than equal role and the teacher can justify her or his role as the giver of knowledge.⁶⁷

Freire believes this teacher-students dichotomy must be

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 58-59.

addressed. "Libertarian education," as Freire calls it, moves "towards reconciliation," and he stresses that the "solution of the teacher-students contradiction has to do with reconciling the poles of contradiction so that both are simultaneously teacher-student and student-student."⁶⁸ Students and teachers need to know that both have knowledge to share and learn. This movement toward reconciliation is important because the banking method of education "mirrors oppressive society as a whole":

a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught; b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing; c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about; d) the teacher talks and the students listen meekly....⁶⁹

The banking method, therefore, reinforces the control of the oppressor over the oppressed. It helps the oppressor to change the thinking of the oppressed to accept the thoughts of the oppressor. Freire states,

The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these incompetent and lazy folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality. These marginals need to be "integrated," "incorporated" into the healthy society they have "forsaken."⁷⁰

The banking method serves as the dominant culture's vehicle to mold and distance itself from the majority. It molds the majority to follow various rules and regulations, the learning of which does not encourage thinking. Freire believes:

⁶⁸ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 59.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 60-61.

The theory and practice of banking education serve this end quite efficiently. Verbalistic lessons, reading requirements, the methods for evaluating 'knowledge,' the criteria for promotion: everything in this ready-to-wear approach serves to obviate thinking.⁷¹

Interaction between teacher and students is important. This interaction is the communication between the two. If there is not authentic communication about reality, then authentic thinking can not take place. Freire insists that communication about reality is necessary to eradicate the superior/inferior roles of teachers and students. He believes students should be allowed to think for themselves and not have the thoughts of others forced upon them. This concern and philosophy of Freire's is stated below:

Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication. If it is true that thought has meaning only when generated by action upon the world, the subordination of students to teachers becomes impossible.⁷²

Another destructive element of the banking concept is that it nurtures death instead of life. This love of death, according to Freire, remains embedded in the banking education because it has a false understanding of men as objects; it cannot promote the development of what Fromm calls "'biophily,'" but instead produces its opposite "'necrophily'...."⁷³ A love for death within this system results from the need for control. The need for control kills life, and the opportunity for creativity becomes limited.

⁷¹ Ibid., 63.

⁷² Ibid., 64.

⁷³ Ibid., 64.

The banking style of education within a society affects even those who consider themselves to be revolutionaries or who promote the cause of liberation. Freire views this lack of awareness as critical because of the influence the banking education has had upon them. He states, "Paradoxically, then, they utilize this same instrument of alienation in what they consider an effort to liberate...."⁷⁴ Indeed, some "revolutionaries" brand as "innocents," "dreamers," or even "reactionaries" those who would challenge this educational practice.⁷⁵

Problem-posing. Freire believes the deposit-making method of education does not encourage persons to think about their relationship to their total environment. The banking style of education needs to be replaced with problem-posing education. As Freire states, "'Problem-posing' education, responding to the essence of consciousness - intentionality - rejects communiques and embodies communication."⁷⁶

Problem-posing utilizes a dialogical relationship between the teacher and student. This type of relationship is important in creating a non-hierarchical teacher-student dynamic. Both teacher and student need to think of themselves as persons who are able to think and contribute their thoughts to one another.

Freire encourages the problem-posing method because it actively engages students in sharing their ideas and feelings. The

⁷⁴ Ibid., 67.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 64.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 66.

teacher does not have all the information on the subject matter being discussed. "The students--no longer docile listeners--are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher."⁷⁷ Within problem-posing, the educator and students are co-creators so that knowledge becomes true knowledge at deeper level of understanding.

Problem-posing involves students in discussions of their problems and the relation of these problems to their part of the world and the world in general.⁷⁸ Students are challenged to engage in this dialogue because the discussions are not about isolated events or ideas. Their thoughts are discussed within a larger framework. This type of discussion brings new understandings and new challenges. As the students continue to dialogue, their responses become more critical. For Freire, these new responses are repeated several times, and this eventually leads students to become dedicated.⁷⁹

According to Freire the banking concept of education mythicizes reality by obscuring facts which can help persons to understand the world in which they exist, but problem posing education is designed to help persons demythologize their world.⁸⁰ Dialogue and critical thinking stimulates students' thoughts so they can address reality. Banking education limits creativity and

⁷⁷ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 66.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 68.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 77.

controls consciousness. As Freire states, "banking education inhibits creativity and domesticates...the intentionality of consciousness by isolating consciousness from the world, thereby denying men their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human."⁸¹ Problem-posing begins with creativity and encourages persons to reflect critically on themselves, their relationship with others, and the world. Problem-posing responds to persons' striving to be human; through questioning and challenging, transformation can take place.⁸²

In summary, banking education and problem-posing are two different ways of understanding education and what are the best pedagogical methods. The banking method of education is confining. A depositor-depositee relationship exists between the student and teacher. Freire's problem-posing method allows students and teachers to explore, challenge, and discuss ideas and feelings without the fear of being reprimanded. Problem-posing is a form of liberation education that motivates students to think for themselves and decide how to relate to the world.

Dialogical action. Two important components of dialogue are reflection and action. Without one, according to Freire the other immediately deteriorates.⁸³ The true word is also praxis, and the world is transformed. For Freire, "There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to

⁸¹ Ibid., 71.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 75.

transform the world."⁸⁴ The diagram below illustrates Freire's understanding of the true word and its relationship to praxis.

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Action      }    word=work=praxis
Reflection }
Sacrifice of action=verbalism
Sacrifice of reflection=activism85

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On the other hand, the word which is unauthentic cannot transform the world. Reflection without action changes the word into "idle chatter, into verbalism, an alienated and alienating 'blah'....one cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action."⁸⁶ Action without reflection becomes activism, and "action for action's sake negates the true praxis and makes dialogue impossible."⁸⁷ Both reflection and action are needed to create authentic dialogue.

Since the basis of dialogue--the right to speak the true word--belongs to all persons, those persons who have been denied the right to speak, must first take ownership of their right and stop the dehumanizing actions of others toward them.⁸⁸ Through dialogue, "speaking their word...naming the world, transform(s) it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which men achieve

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 77.

significance as men."⁸⁹ Through honest dialogue between people, and not one person or group naming the world for themselves and others, the search for truth can begin. Freire constantly repeats this point because he does not believe one person or group of persons should dominate others. Dialogue requires interaction among persons. Freire believes that dialogue is an experience among men who give names to all the world, so all persons need to be a part of this process and not just a few who speak for others.⁹⁰ If this is not done, then the thoughts and words of others will not be heard.

Freire's emphasis on dialogue involves the power to name the world. Freire understands the power to name the world as a creative act. He highlights this when he advocates that the power to name the world is part of creation and is not be used as a means to control others.⁹¹ Having the power to name the world gives people the opportunity to believe they do have some power and control over lives.

Freire believes that the spoken word, in the form of dialogue, does not happen in a vacuum. For Freire, dialogue must have five other components to be effective: love, humility, faith, hope, and critical thinking. Freire's Christian background comes through in this particular instance. The Apostle Paul writes in Gal. 5:22, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering,

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

gentleness, goodness, faith." Although Freire is not explicit about the connection of the fruits of the Spirit as noted by Paul, he does implicitly apply them throughout his work. These components are important characteristics that a Christian should have, as God's Spirit continues to lead and guide interaction between individuals. When these elements are present, they create a climate of mutual respect, affirmation, and acceptance.

According to Freire, love is necessary in the naming of the world. "The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love."⁹² Love is the foundation of dialogue. It provides the groundwork for courage and not fear. To be committed to love is to be committed to the liberation of the oppressed. If there is no love, the commitment and willingness to care, respect, and do for others and self are empty words and deeds. As Freire declares, "If I do not love the world-if I do not love life-if I do not love men-I cannot enter into dialogue."⁹³

Humility is the next important element needed in dialogue. Since dialogue involves trying to re-create the world through naming it, there is no room for arrogant attitudes. Arrogance cannot be a part of dialogue because some persons come with beliefs of their own superiority and of other people's ignorance. Freire asks the question, "How can I dialogue if I always project

⁹² Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 77.

⁹³ Ibid.

ignorance onto others and never perceive my own?"⁹⁴ The lack of humility creates separation and division among the people if there are those who are not able to listen and learn from others. Freire lists several questions which address the need for humility to be included in dialogue. Two of these questions are:

2) How can I dialogue if I am closed to-and even offended by contribution of others?; and 3) How can I dialogue if I am afraid of being displaced, the mere possibility causing me torment and weakness?....⁹⁵

If there is no humility in dialogue, then learning between persons cannot occur, and the co-creative relationship needed in naming the world cannot take place.

Another important characteristic for dialogue to be effective is faith. Faith in this instance means, "an intense faith in man, faith in his power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in his vocation to be more fully human (which is not the privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all men)."⁹⁶ Having faith in other persons serves as a basis for working with others. This faith must not be a blind faith because critical thinking is included in this faith. Faith in humanity must be a part of dialogue in order to keep it (dialogue) honest.

From faith comes trust. Communication between persons involved in dialogue must be based on truth. As Freire explains, "It would be a contradiction in terms if dialogue-loving, humble,

⁹⁴ Ibid., 78.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 79.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

and full of faith-did not produce this climate of mutual trust, which leads the dialoguers into ever closer partnership in the naming of the world."⁹⁷ If these elements of love, humility, and faith are not true, then trust cannot be established. Both sides must bring honest words and actions. Actions which are not the same as the words do not build trust. "To say one thing and do another - to take one's own word lightly - cannot inspire trust."⁹⁸ Trust provides the opportunity for persons to speak truthfully and builds confidence among all concerned.

Dialogue must also include hope. Hope is also grounded in the relationship and fellowship of humanity. "The dehumanization resulting from an unjust order is not a cause for despair, but for hope, leading to the incessant pursuit of the humanity denied by injustice."⁹⁹ Hope provides a driving force to encourage persons to fight. If there is no hope, then persons involved in the dialogical process will not believe there is any need to fight. Hopelessness, instead of hope, becomes a way of life. This state of hopelessness works against persons striving to become more fully human. Hope is needed to fight the causes of injustice as persons strive to create a just new world. Hope does not mean sitting around and waiting for change to happen. As Freire points out, "hope, however, does not consist in crossing one's arms and waiting. As long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight

⁹⁷ Ibid., 80.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

with hope, then I can wait.¹⁰⁰

Freire's last element needed in dialogue is critical thinking. Critical thinking involves "thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity-thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved."¹⁰¹ The transformation of reality is what Freire says the critical thinker is concerned with, not with having things remain the same. This is important because transforming reality for the humanization of humanity is necessary. Freire states, "For the critic, the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality, on behalf of the continuing humanization of men."¹⁰²

Critical thinking comes from dialogue. Through dialogue, persons are able to talk with each other in a critical mode. Questioning and rethinking are part of this process. "Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education."¹⁰³ Education for liberation emphasizes that both students and teachers are able freely to contribute their thoughts. Communication on the teacher's part becomes particularly important in this process. The teacher must be willing to think about what she or he will dialogue with students about. This type of thinking and interaction provides an environment for open

¹⁰⁰ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 80.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 81.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

dialogue and critical thinking to take place. Dialogue within education does not begin when the teacher meets the students, but it begins when the teacher asks what she or he will dialogue with the students about.¹⁰⁴

Dialogue is not the right of an elite group nor is critical thinking. Ideas, opinions, and active participation by all persons, and not a select few, in designing, implementing, and critiquing education is important to the society. If more persons have a voice in what and how education is to be structured, this can create more opportunities for the voice of the silent majority to be heard. Communication is a key to opening the closed doors that persons with power have been able to keep shut.

Example of Literacy Program

The literacy program developed by Freire provides an example of an educational process that teaches people to read and involves students at the same time in dialoguing about issues. Freire believes that learning to read is more than learning words, but it also involves being able to understand these words on more than a surface level.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, participants in the literacy program have the opportunity to become part of Culture Circles.¹⁰⁶ The Culture Circles are made up of a small number of persons, providing an opportunity for everyone to be heard. Persons in these groups are able to present their ideas, challenge each other, and reflect

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 82.

¹⁰⁵ Freire, Education for Critical Consciousness, 48.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

upon the thoughts which have been expressed. Participants in the program are shown illustrations to stimulate their dialogue. The pictures help encourage the participants to dialogue on various topics from spirituality to economics.

The following are examples of the dialogical process among students as they learn how to read. It is quite clear that this method is based on the cultural and political situation in Brazil. The words and the images used in these exercises are not foreign thoughts or abstract ideas. The illustrations relate to the cultural and political situation, and students are encouraged to think and interpret the picture in these terms. Students are not limited to thinking about these concepts, but these concepts are emphasized to help students realize that they are part of the culture and can participate in creating a healthier society. Eventually, words are introduced which are drawn from what students have discussed and are part of their daily activities. The following illustration and story will demonstrate this.

Picture 1



Courtesy of Rachonda Mitchell

A Vase, The Product of Man's Work Upon the Material of Nature

During a discussion of this situation in a Culture Circle of Recife, I was moved to hear a woman say with emotion, 'I make culture. I know how to make that.' Many participants, referring to the flowers in the vase, say, 'As flowers, they are nature. As decoration, they are culture.' The esthetic dimension of the product, which in a sense had been awakened from the beginning, is now reinforced.¹⁰⁷

*Picture 2



First the coordinator reads, slowly, the text which has been projected. 'This is a poem,' everyone usually says. ...Through the discussion they perceive, in critical terms, that poetic expression, whose material is not the same, responds to a different necessity. After discussing aspects of popular and erudite artistic expression in various field, the coordinator rereads the text and submits it to a group discussion.

*'THE BOMB: 'The terrible atomic bomb/And radioactivity/Signify terror,/Ruin and calamity....¹⁰⁸

Critique

The following critique of Freire will include a review of Freire's view of human nature, his social and political context, and conscientization. Freire discusses throughout his work the dehumanizing condition of the oppressive society and how the

¹⁰⁷ Freire, Education for Critical Consciousness, 74-75.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 76-77.

oppressed can transform the society if they come together to reflect, dialogue, and take action to change the problem. Yet, with his religious grounding, it is surprising to find that Freire does not address in detail such religious themes as original sin, evil, and the natural pain and suffering that occurs within humanity. As mentioned earlier, Freire does warn against the oppressed becoming like the oppressor and oppressing the oppressed.

There are several stories in history which depict this human phenomenon of how even those who were once oppressed will oppress others, if given the opportunity. When I think of Freire's naivete, I am reminded of the story in George Orwell's novel, Animal Farm. The farm animals complained and fussed about the cruel conditions and treatment given to them by the humans. If the animals were in charge, they would not treat each other in such subordinate and uncaring ways. The irony and the sadness of the story becomes all too clear when the animals do take the place of the humans. Instead of the collegiality and camaraderie they predicted, the animals practiced the same elitist and class distinctions as the humans. The animals even began to take on certain physical characteristics that the people exhibited. For example, the pigs became the bossy leaders and developed double chins and outward mannerisms like the males who had been their keepers.

Freire's perspective on human nature needs to be more inclusive of the possibility that those who experience freedom may treat others in dehumanizing ways as well. Freedom does not always

mean that the right choice will always be made. Although freedom from oppression means liberation for those who are now not free, this does not mean that they will "act responsibly and humanely."¹⁰⁹ This limited view of human nature does not include the religious tradition of sin and evil. Perhaps, Freire knows his view of human nature will never happen completely, so he writes about his desire and how he thinks the world should be. Sometimes if you act as if the problem does not exist, then you do not have to deal with it. As Elias states, "It lacks some of the realism of [the Christian] tradition with its strong insistence upon original sin or the corruptibility of man."¹¹⁰

His push for revolutionary and radical changes in society comes from his view of human nature and the hope that humanity can and will change. Freire's vision of utopia is a dream that will probably not be realized in his lifetime. This vision, which relies on the goodness of the oppressed to treat others as they want to be treated, and on the willingness of those who have the power actually to give up their power, is not realistic. Sin, evil, and human suffering are so much a part of life that more than dialogue is required to deal with the corruption and pain in this world.

Freire's analysis of the social and political oppression and problems within the Latin American/Brazilian context is very important. He is quite clear that these dichotomized groups i.e.,

¹⁰⁹ Elias, 43.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

oppressed and oppressor, dominated and dominator, and subject and object--are the polarized relationships within this context. These polarized groups illustrate the depth of dehumanizing forces within the society.

Freire is very much aware of not trying to enforce one way of thinking onto others. He discusses how the educational methods he uses do not place expectations from one context onto another. Yet, some have criticized Freire for grouping persons into similar polarized categories. These attributes define the dehumanizing conditions of such relationships as if there were a universal way in which these relationships function. These relationships need to be questioned for the forms of polarized relationships may not be true in all circumstances. As one author notes:

Freire's propensity to see Latin American culture as a function of one basic relational pattern obstructs his vision with respect to others, which may be equally important for his educational ideas. All political, social, and cultural data are forced into a univocal theory of relationships giving rise to a particular pedagogical thrust.¹¹¹

Also, Freire's belief in the power of people to think critically, to know what is the authentic situation, and then, to act to transform the reality is not always realistic. His understanding of conscientization is built upon his interpretation of the social and political oppression in the Latin American society. I agree that people can think critically about a

¹¹¹ Bruce Boston, "Paulo Freire: Notes of a Loving Critic," in Paulo Freire: A Revolutionary Dilemma for the Adult Educator, ed. Stanley Grabowski, Publications in Continuing Education and ERIC Clearinghouse (Syracuse: Syracuse University, 1972), 88.

situation and see the truth in the situation, but this does not mean that the people will want or be able to transform the situation. Although in Pedagogy of the Oppressed he discusses the fear of freedom and its responsibility, he does not acknowledge how powerful is this fear in blocking transformation. For example, many African Americans are educated persons with excellent critical thinking skills, but this does not encourage them to transform the racist conditions in the United States. Other African Americans are very aware of the oppressive conditions under which they live and would like for them to change; and can even give constructive suggestions as to how to make changes; but because they have been beaten down so long, their will to make a difference has dissipated. As one author notes,

Through conscientization, for Freire, individuals are brought to see reality as it really is. In Freire's description of his method, the group arrives at a true and authentic knowledge of the situation. One sees little awareness in his writings of the complexities of the reality which people are attempting to grapple.¹¹²

Critical thinking is important, but there must be more than just knowing what is the truth. Persons must be willing to risk their lives and live their lives for the truth. For example, Pilate knew the truth about Jesus, but the law and the people's cry to free Barabas and to crucify Jesus led Pilate to wash his hands of Jesus. He turned Jesus over to the crowd and turned his back on the truth. Knowing the truth and the right thing to do, does not mean a person will do it because there are often more problems and

¹¹² Elias, 139.

issues involved than deciding what is right or wrong. Pilate's job and life were on the line. Self-preservation often dictates what a person will do, as opposed to what is right and what is best for the group.

CHAPTER 5

Nannie Helen Burroughs

In this chapter a brief biographical sketch of Nannie Burroughs is presented. Also, her understanding of the learning process and a critique of this process are discussed. Her work has promising implications for religious education with African American deaf children.

Biographical Background

Nannie Helen Burroughs was born in Orange, Virginia in 1879.¹ At the age of five, her mother brought her to Washington, D.C. She studied business, domestic science, science, literature, and political and social sciences in high school, and graduated with honors. After graduation she applied for a job as a domestic science teacher, but was not selected. She decided that one day she would open her own school. Burroughs left Washington and went to Philadelphia to work as associate editor of a Baptist paper, The Christian Banner. She returned to Washington and passed the civil service exam with high marks, but was denied a job as clerk because of her race. She was told that "they were not 'seeking to employ a colored clerk.'"² After working as a janitor for awhile, she left Washington and went to Louisville, Kentucky in 1900 to work as a stenographer, bookkeeper, and editorial secretary for the Foreign Mission Board of the National Baptist Convention. During this time, she taught typing, sewing, bookkeeping, cooking, and other

¹ "A Brief Biographical Sketch," 1.

² Ibid., 2.

courses for anyone who paid ten cents a week to attend.

Burroughs was considered an impressive speaker and had many offers to speak. She delivered a speech in 1900 at the National Baptist Convention entitled, "Hindered from Helping."³ This speech roused the people so much, that she was elected secretary of the National Baptist Women's Convention. During this time, Burroughs mentioned her dream to start a school. It would take several years, but eventually, Burroughs started her school in 1909 in Washington, D.C. The school was initially named the National Training School for Women and Girls. Girls and women from various parts of the world came to the school. The name was changed to the National Trade and Professional School for Women and Girls in 1939. After the death of Nannie H. Burroughs in 1961, the name was changed again to the Nannie Helen Burroughs School.

Burroughs did the fund raising and whatever else was needed to start the school. She had appealed to the National Baptist Convention for financial assistance, but many persons, especially the men of the Convention, were opposed to her opening the school. There was even a vote taken at the Convention not to support the school, and persons were forbidden from giving financial support to the school in the Convention's name. Her visions and desire were too strong for her not to start the school, however; Burroughs was a very resourceful and self-reliant person. She found a group of white women who were willing to support the school.

If one group did not support her efforts, she would find

³ Ibid.

someone who would. The curriculum of the school included courses such as religion, cleanliness, vocational training, and English. Sewing, interior decorating, gardening, typing, home nursing, printing, shoe-repair, barbering, and bookkeeping were also some of the courses taught. Students were also required to take a course in Negro history.

The school is still open today, but the focus is no longer on girls and women only. It is an elementary through junior high school educational program for girls and boys. There is also a nursery school program for younger children. The history of Burroughs lives on in the school through a museum room housed in the school for anyone to see.

Finally, Burroughs was not university trained. Her style of writing is open and straightforward. Her everyday common sense advice on how African Americans should learn to improve their conduct leaves little to the imagination. Therefore, the section on Burroughs will not be too lengthy, and like her written materials, will be concise and to the point. Thus, I will preserve the integrity of her thoughts and actions, and leave the reader with an honest interpretation. Unlike the numerous books which are available about Paulo Freire's life, work, and thoughts, there are not many resources which offer in-depth analysis or critique of the life, work, and thoughts of Nannie H. Burroughs. Yet, from reading books by Burroughs, it is possible to construct a model of how Burroughs understood education and how persons are to be educated. Burroughs, unlike Freire, is not as intentional in outlining her

understanding of the learning process; however, after reading about her life and work in available sources, I was able to outline how she understood the learning process.

Burroughs' Learning Process

In the following sections, Burroughs's understanding of the learning process will be discussed in relation to the following topics: (1) the social and political context, (2) Christianity, (3) educational method, (4) development of character traits, and (5) economic self-sufficiency. The last section will be a critique of Burroughs.

The Social and Political Context

Burroughs' work, like Freire's, grows out of the socially and politically oppressive conditions of her society. Both educators designed their particular educational processes from their respective oppressive contexts. Burroughs and Freire discuss the injustice and oppression that permeates their countries. Freire is addressing the needs and problems of those he calls the oppressed, (i.e., the Latin American underclass), and Burroughs targets the needs and problems of African Americans in general and African American women in particular.

During the period in which Burroughs wrote, racial injustice was very overt. Segregation and violence were everyday experiences. Burroughs was among the many persons who fought for equality and justice for African Americans. She realized that African Americans had a difficult and hard life. Yet, they had made it through slavery, so the present conditions were not

insurmountable. The injustice of being the last hired and first fired, low wages, unemployment, menial jobs, few educational opportunities to attend colleges and universities, and the ever present "Colored Only" and "White Only" signs, were some of the dehumanizing conditions that African Americans endured. Burroughs speaks out against the constant insults that African Americans experience from whites. For example, if the white race says that African Americans should accept being called "boy" or "girl" instead of "Sir" or "Ma'am" and insulted in other demeaning ways, this should not be tolerated. She makes up the point that these insults do hurt and are painful to the very soul of African Americans. Burroughs admonishes anyone who thinks that these insults do not hurt and lists different reasons why blacks should resent these types of remarks. One basic reason is that it is human to resent such remarks.⁴

Many leaders and educators emerged during this same period of time, including W. E. B. DuBois, Mary McLeod Bethune, Booker T. Washington, and Marcus Garvey. From slavery to Jim Crow, African Americans were experiencing harsh and cruel times. Each of these leaders, in his or her unique way, gave something to help African Americans better cope with social, economic, and political oppression.

Each of these leaders and educators approached the problems faced by African Americans in a different way, but many of their

⁴ Nannie H. Burroughs, Think on These Things (Washington, D.C.: Nannie H. Burroughs Publications, 1982), 37.

goals were the same. For example, Burroughs, DuBois, Garvey, Bethune, and Washington had the same four goals: (1) freedom for African Americans to live as human beings and not to be treated like animals, (2) education for African Americans, (3) self-esteem and racial pride, and (4) economic self-sufficiency. Their approaches to reaching these goals were sometimes different, but their influence into creating a better society for African Americans still lives on today.

Burroughs was born into a time that had seen the end of Reconstruction; Jim Crowism was well established in the society. The second class economic and social status of African Americans was firmly planted in the American culture. Accommodation and confrontation were two themes during this era. Accommodation is best illustrated by Booker T. Washington. Washington was born into slavery and rose to great fame and prominence during his day. He was viewed as a leader to many African Americans and was an advisor to President Roosevelt.

Washington's understanding of social, economic, political theory, and his practical application of these theories, was influenced by the following factors: "1) his experience in slavery; 2) his education at Hampton Institute; 3) the tasks before him at Tuskegee; and 4) his reading of the socio-historical setting in which he operated."⁵ Washington advocated "accommodation to social inequality and disenfranchisement," claiming that "agitation of

⁵ Maulana Karenga, Introduction to Black Studies (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1982), 111.

questions of social equality is the extremest folly" and that not 'artificial forcing' but productive labor and business would end discrimination."⁶ At the same time that Washington was publicly encouraging accommodation practices for African Americans, he worked behind the scenes to fight against racism and injustice. He was applauded by many for this work and criticized because he did not openly denounce racism. The self-help principle was also a part of Washington's theory and practical approach for how African Americans could begin to make changes.

Washington encouraged African Americans to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps and not to let their problems and anger with whites stand in the way of taking advantage of opportunity. His self-help method included learning skills which would help persons to develop their own economic base and not to believe that they have to depend on someone else. Washington stressed the need for African Americans to participate in some type of labor. He believed that labor was an important value and was not a dishonor. In his autobiography, Up From Slavery, he writes, "At Hampton I not only learned that it was not a disgrace to labour, but learned to love labour, not alone for its financial value, but for labour's own sake and for the independence and self-reliance which the ability to do something which the world wants...."⁷

Booker T. Washington was a strong leader for African Americans

⁶ Ibid., 112.

⁷ Booker T. Washington, Up From Slavery (1901); reprinted in Three Negro Classics (New York: Avon Books, 1965), 68.

and well known throughout the country, but other leaders were very much opposed to Washington's support of accommodation. DuBois, who was also a national leader, was very much opposed to Washington for publicly stating in a very clear manner his belief in accommodation. In spite of Washington's support of accommodation, Washington remained a national leader. Three important factors helped Washington maintain his ability to be a significant leader during his time. These three factors were "capitalism, racism, and Christianity."⁸ Washington's emphasis on education and learning vocational skills helped to provide the country's capitalist with laborers who would be non-threatening and not be distracted by any type of political loyalty. He advocated for separateness for African Americans and whites and a non-interest in politics and civil rights concerns. His commitment to be faithful to whites was pleasing to whites and compatible with the exigencies of racism. The moral changes which he wanted to for African Americans were part of the Christian thinking which was prevalent during this time. Washington also stressed the need for African Americans to learn "values and virtues" which would help to change the belief that slaves had been lazy, immoral and wasteful.⁹

Due to the failure of Reconstruction to secure equality for African American Jim Crowism made political involvement for African Americans difficult during this period. Washington believed that if African Americans did not agitate the system by becoming

⁸ Karenga, 113.

⁹ Ibid., 112.

involved in politics it would help to create a better life for African Americans. In Washington's Atlanta Exposition speech, which was later called the Atlanta Compromise by many African American leaders, he articulates his political stand for African Americans. Washington stated in his speech:

I tried to emphasize the fact that while the Negro should not be deprived by unfair means of the franchise, political agitation alone would not save him, that back of the ballot he must have property, industry, skill, economy, intelligence, and character, and that no race without these elements could permanently succeed.¹⁰

He believed that African Americans needed more than political rights to achieve success and greatness. Education, skills, and economic strength were some of the factors which Washington believed to be keys to success for African Americans. Many persons were opposed to Washington's emphasis on not challenging whites to change the racist practices which excluded African Americans from voting and holding political offices.

Among his many accomplishments, Washington left behind a diverse and powerful legacy. Washington's death did not end his quest for education for African Americans. The college he started, Tuskegee in Alabama, is still providing students with the opportunity to receive an education. He was an excellent orator, an author, a politician, an educator, and leader. Booker T. Washington's controversial style of leadership and his beliefs about how African Americans should go about gaining their dignity and freedom were challenged by many. Yet, Washington remains an

¹⁰ Washington, 141.

impressive figure in the history of the United States.

A renowned scholar and leader, W. E. B. DuBois was quite prominent during the time of Burroughs and Washington. Unlike Washington, who emphasized political and social accommodation to whites, DuBois was very outspoken about African Americans needing to become involved in their own political and social advancement. He believed that African Americans should confront the various problems that helped to support and perpetuate racism and racial prejudice. DuBois developed a model for how African Americans could work to change the degrading structures within which they had to exist. DuBois first designed a plan called the Talented Tenth. The Talented Tenth would consist of African Americans who would serve as leaders to help others gain their sense of dignity and human freedom. Next, DuBois pushed for African Americans to receive a "multidimensional education" which would provide them with the opportunity to learn how to operate competently in this society and throughout the world.¹¹

DuBois also emphasized the need for racial pride and cultural diversity which would give African Americans a sense of self and full participation in all of the American society. Unlike Washington, who advocated accommodation, DuBois emphasized the need for African Americans to openly confront the social, political, and economic issues which faced them. He challenged the political system of his day. DuBois gives an insightful and critical analysis of how the political system worked against African

¹¹ Karenga, 115.

Americans and how African Americans have been humiliated in various ways and debarred from participating in or receiving benefits from the political system. He wrote that "To-day the black man of the South has almost nothing to say as to how much he shall be taxed, or how these taxes shall be expended."¹² DuBois continued his attack on the lack of political support that African Americans received.

Daily the Negro is coming more and more to look upon law and justice, not as protecting safeguards, but as sources of humiliation and oppression. The laws are made by men who have little interest in him; they are executed by men who have absolutely no motive for treating the black people with courtesy or consideration;....¹³

DuBois pushed for African Americans to become more involved in politics and not to believe that they do not have a right to participate in politics or to receive its benefits. Under the leadership of DuBois and others, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was formed to address the complex problems facing African Americans. DuBois also realized the need for African Americans to be concerned with issues related to Africa and the relationship between Africa and African Americans. He formed a Pan-African group to address these issues and became involved in other organizations concerned with the African struggle for independence. Finally, DuBois initially emphasized "cooperative economics for the Black community" and later advocated socialism as the way in which African Americans

¹² W. E. B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk (New York: Avon Books, 1965), 328.

¹³ Ibid.

could gain economic strength.¹⁴

Both Washington and DuBois are still considered two of the most prominent leaders, scholars, writers, educators, orators, and political trailblazers of the United States. Their leadership and skill helped to pave the way for other leaders within the African American community. Nannie H. Burroughs represents such a leader. It has been reported that

Burroughs and Washington often exchanged views, and were similar in their approach to vocational education, but in the debate between Washington and W. E. B. DuBois concerning the feasibility of practical versus classical education for black Americans, she was probably somewhere between the two....¹⁵

Washington and DuBois both helped to create an environment in which educators such as Burroughs and Bethune were able to create programs and articulate the educational, social, spiritual, political, economic, and other needs of African Americans.

During this time, African American leaders advocated education as the way for African Americans to help themselves overcome racial problems and transform society. Burroughs believed likewise, but she believed that through education the African American must grasp some other vital concepts. She thought that in addition to the traditional academic courses (e.g., reading, writing, and African American history), vocational skills were also important in a school curriculum. Intellectual development and the development of manual skills were considered essential parts of

¹⁴ Karenga, 116.

¹⁵ "A Brief Biographical Sketch," 5.

education for her. With the limited job opportunities available to African Americans during her time, learning a skill provided students with a chance for employment.

Within this social and political context, Nannie H. Burroughs began speaking out against racial and gender injustices aimed at African Americans and began working to build a school for girls and women. Her love for God and a deep rooted conviction in the humanity and equality of all persons provided Burroughs with the motivation to lead the fight for "Justice for All."

Christianity

Nannie H. Burroughs was deeply grounded and rooted in the religious tradition of Christianity. From her Christian orientation, Burroughs' ideas and practices flowed. Her themes of education, development of character traits, and economic self-sufficiency all flow from her understanding of what it means to be a Christian.

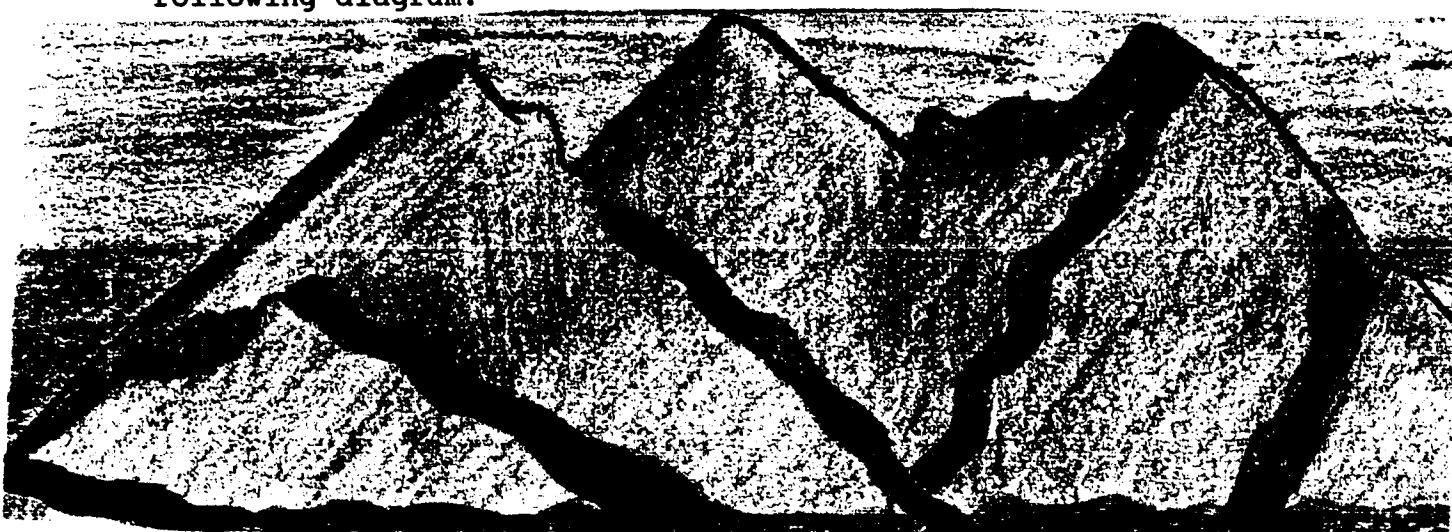
Christianity for Burroughs was more than a once a week social activity, but a belief which permeated all aspects of life. Religion in its fullest intent is to be lived out rather than spoken of. "Christianity knows no color. If 'color' in religion means anything it must mean a quality of mind and soul. It means pure in heart--nothing else is of God or godly. It means full of good works which they do."¹⁶ For Burroughs, Christianity means that all Christians are expected to serve God in the church, home, abroad, and in the community. Christianity embodies love,

¹⁶ Burroughs, Think On These Things, 47.

liberation, and justice; it condemns injustice. Christianity calls to repentance those who treat others as objects and who dehumanize the value of life by creating barriers for people.

It is on her strong Christian foundation that Burroughs' learning process is based. Burroughs' learning theory is based on her understanding that if every person becomes a better Christian, then she or he will become a better citizen and a better person. In becoming better Christians and better persons, people develop character traits, sharpen their intellectual development and vocational skills, and become economically self-sufficient.

Burroughs' learning process can be best illustrated in the following diagram:



Courtesy of Rachonda Mitchell

This drawing of her learning process reminds me of water flowing from streams into a river. The streams come together to form a river, but one stream without the other will weaken the strength of the river because part of the river's water supply has been cut off. Burroughs advocates that four components--Christianity,

education, economic self-sufficiency, and development of character traits--are needed for persons to be the best they can be.

It is not surprising to find religion as the main source from which Burroughs shapes her learning theory. The church has served as a powerful source of strength for the African American community. Not only has it been a spiritual nurturer and guide, it has also served as a refuge from the abuse and injustices inflicted by racism, sexism, and classism. The violence done to the soul and body can be healed in the church.

The church has been and continues to be a central part of the African American community. After slavery, the church served as the refuge place for African Americans. After Reconstruction and early in the twentieth century, church membership grew. John Hope Franklin notes that "by midcentury thirty-four all-Negro denominations claimed a membership of more than 5 million Negroes, more than 35,000 churches, and property valued at nearly \$200 million."¹⁷ Also, Franklin notes that the black church remained what one observer called "the place of refuge for the black community."¹⁸

Also, the church offers service for those in need (e.g., food and clothing programs). Caring for the spiritual and physical needs of the people helps to give them hope. The church's social activism challenges people to transform society. Training leaders

¹⁷ John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 378.

¹⁸ Ibid.

to respond to social and political issues is part of what the church has to offer the people. Through the church's involvement in social issues, the people are encouraged to participate actively in trying to transform society.

Providing educational programs has been a vital part of how the church seeks to educate persons in and outside of the church. The church offers many educational opportunities, including Sunday Schools; educational programs for ministers, laypersons, and teachers; and workshops concerning health care. In addition to the educational opportunities, economic development has been a part of the church's history. Through developing life insurance programs, missionary funds, and fund raisers for many purposes, churches have contributed to economic independence and growth within the church community.

One of Burroughs' publications is entitled, Twelve Things a Negro Must Do for Himself and Twelve Things White People Must Stop Doing to the Negro. This particular work offers a skeleton which is helpful for outlining the various components of her learning process. Her concept of Christianity is best understood through the examination of two of these twelve steps. One of these, steps two, is

2. The Negro Must Stop Expecting God and White Folk to Do for Him What He Can Do For Himself.¹⁹

In step two, Christianity serves as the propeller for self-help. This self-help theme was quite prevalent at the turn of the

¹⁹ Burroughs, Twelve Things the Negro Must Do, 5.

century. Such leaders as Booker T. Washington, a former slave and founder of Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama, was one of the most influential leaders of his time. He strongly advocated that African Americans need to have a vocational education to lift themselves up and become respected by whites. Burroughs, like Washington, emphasized the need to learn a skill. It is important for persons to pick themselves up and take care of their lives without expecting God or white folks to do for them.

Burroughs stressed self-reliance and self-sufficiency as necessary to create independence. Taking care of your needs, rather than waiting for someone else to do this, provides a strong foundation and will. This foundation and will tells others that you can take care of your needs without depending on the whims and wishes of others. If persons always expect God to answer their every need or desire without any work or energy from themselves, God serves as a bellhop, and the people can become lazy. If it is always up to white folks to provide the needs of others, the paternalistic and maternalistic patterns continue. African Americans continue to be the children, and whites the parents who have the power.

Burroughs knows that African Americans have power as individuals and as a race to change their oppressive conditions. Yet, if African Americans do not rely on their abilities and resources, they will remain dependent on others to do for them what they can do for themselves. Utilizing the mind, body, and soul to take care of our needs encourages everyone to realize that the

power within themselves can make a difference. This belief in self-reliance and determination is reflected in Burroughs' stating, "When the Negro makes up his mind that he is through being a second class citizen and decides that whatever it takes to move up into the first class that he is going to do it or report to God the reason why...."²⁰

The other step which applies directly to her understanding of Christianity is step five:

5. The Negro Must Make His Religion An Everyday Practice And Not Just A Sunday-go-to-Meeting Emotional Affair.²¹

Burroughs wants people to take their religion seriously. For her, going to church on Sunday is not the only thing Christians are to do. If the person takes her or his religion seriously, then it means that he or she advocates and practices justice, education, economic self-sufficiency, and good personal character. Burroughs does not separate the sacred and secular. What a person professes to believe should be reflected in behavior inside and outside of the church.

Taking religion seriously also includes taking the liberating message of the Bible seriously. Burroughs chastises persons for not taking the Bible seriously. The Bible offers a road map to what a person should do with her or his life. Burroughs asserts that the Bible tells everyone that no one is to dominate anyone else. If this is true, then a person should not allow others to be

²⁰ Burroughs, Think on These Things, 61.

²¹ Burroughs, Twelve Things the Negro Must Do, 8.

dominated. The Bible advocates justice and equality. If a person takes Christianity to heart, she or he cannot accept or participate in unjust and dehumanizing conditions. Burroughs writes, "It teaches us how to bring human liberty into a working relationship with the Divine law, and thus bring peace on earth. It offers an effectual remedy for all the evils that drag mankind down."²²

The Bible provides the key to living life as a good Christian and citizen. Burroughs' liberating message of religion is heard today in the voices of black theology and womanist theology. All three speak to the liberating power of Christ and the active part that African Americans have in their own freedom. All three want the liberation of African Americans from racial, economic, social, and political injustices. Although black theology has included addressing the issue of sexism, womanist theologians and Burroughs make this a major concern in their respective work. For example, Burroughs emphasized in her writing and in her school that girls and women need to rely on themselves to provide for their care. This belief is reflected in the motto of the school--"the highest development of Christian womanhood."²³ The motto reflects Burroughs' belief that the school offered the girls and women the chance to become the best they could be by taking responsibility for their lives.

Womanist theology offers a way of understanding Burroughs' theme of liberation for men and women through Christianity. Kelly

²² Ibid., 5.

²³ "A Brief Biographical Sketch," 5.

Brown, Assistant Professor of Theology at Howard University, states: "A womanist understanding of Christ must confirm that Christ is a 'whole' liberator; it must point to Christ's commitment to liberate black men and black women from their social oppression."²⁴ For Burroughs', Christ provides the way for persons to be free and to live a fuller life.

Black liberation theology also echoes the liberation motif of Burroughs. Burroughs is not considered a forerunner in the black liberation movement, yet many of her thoughts are similar to contemporary black liberation theology. For example, Burroughs throughout her work, discusses the economic, social, and political concerns of African Americans. The experience of African Americans is important to understand so that the oppressive system can be challenged. Black theology begins with the experience of African American people. The experiences of African Americans serve as the departure point for what issues need to be addressed. James Cone articulates this belief as well. He states that "Black Theology has as its starting point in the Black condition."²⁵ This condition involves the social, political, economic problems that have affected the black experience.

Some may think of Burroughs as accommodating the norms developed by white society for African Americans. On the one hand, Burroughs does put emphasis on changes that African Americans

²⁴ Kelly Brown, "God Is As Christ Does: Toward a Womanist Theology," Journal of Religious Thought 1 (1989): 15.

²⁵ James H. Cone, Black Theology and Black Power (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 18.

should make which would make them more acceptable to whites. Yet, her values of cleanliness, education, character development, Christianity (or other religious beliefs), and economic self-sufficiency are part of the culture of African Americans. Burroughs wants African Americans to be the best that they can be in spite of the harsh and difficult times which they faced. These characteristics are helpful to learning how to survive in this society. Therefore, while Burroughs appears to be accommodating the values that society has accepted as the property of whites, she wants African Americans to recognize these values as ways which are already a part of who they are. In doing this, they can build themselves and the race to greater heights. Burroughs' deep religious beliefs provided her with the strength and courage to make a difference in the lives of African Americans. From this strength and courage, Burroughs' learning theory takes root and shapes this process. Her Christian convictions are not a separate entity in her life, but they inform and guide her whole life, and they can help others to fight for their freedom.

Although Burroughs is not thought of as a liberationist, many of the issues and concerns that she emphasized have helped to create black theology. One of the central themes of black theology is that the experiences of black people serve as a source for black theology. Burroughs is not only a person who herself fought injustice but also one who worked hard to change oppressive structures. Being a liberationist involves challenging the social order so that it will benefit the oppressed. One way that

Burroughs challenged the social order in her day was through her advocacy of rights for girls and women. She also spoke out and wrote against lynchings and supported the voting rights act for women and blacks. As C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya write, she influenced "women to provide political support for issues like suffrage for blacks and women, the anti-lynching campaign, temperance, decent housing, greater employment opportunities for women, and labor laws to protect women and children."²⁶

Burroughs is a liberationist because she dared to confront and make a difference in the injustice that blacks experienced from whites. She also challenged whites as well as blacks to make a difference. Burroughs worked within her context and the opportunities that she had. Unlike DuBois or Washington, Burroughs did not attend college. Yet, like Washington, she built a school, and like DuBois, she wanted blacks to develop their minds and skills to become fully human. Finally, her desire to instill a sense of pride still echoes today.

Educational Method

Educational method is important to Burroughs; she is concerned with how a person becomes a better person and Christian. Burroughs believes in both the academic and practical dimensions of education. From Burroughs' educational perspective, these two components work together to improve the conditions of the African American. During her time, Burroughs was thought of as one of the

²⁶ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, The Black Church in the African American Experience (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 284.

major educational leaders. "There was a general attitude, says Noble, that 'Negro women should be trained to teach in order to uplift the masses.'"²⁷ Burroughs thought academic studies (e.g., mathematics and English) were important to learn, but skills--such as domestic engineering for women--should also be developed and learned as a science. She realized even then that African American women needed to be trained and become professionals in the domestic engineering field. Burroughs believes that "the field is still open-but if Negro women do not learn the art (domestic engineering), they will surely lose out in another occupation (we have already lost several) that, in the world tomorrow, will be highly paid, standardized professions."²⁸

In Burroughs' day, education became the vehicle by which blacks were able to realize their hopes. As the number of black colleges and other educational institutions grew, blacks began attending school in greater numbers. The mood of the country during this time promoted education. She lived during "the great educational awakening that pervaded the United States in the closing years of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth century."²⁹

In Burroughs' 1968 publication, Twelve Things The Negro Must Do For Himself, three of her twelve steps support the high value

²⁷ Nannie Burroughs, A National Crusade Working to Improve American Life on All Fronts (Washington, D.C.: Nannie H. Burroughs Publications, n.d.), 79.

²⁸ Burroughs, Think on These Things, 106.

²⁹ Franklin, 243.

she places on education. The three steps are:

6. The Negro Must Highly resolve to Wipe Out Mass Ignorance.

11. The Average So-Called Educated Negro Will Have to Come Down Out Of The Air. He Is Too Inflated Over Nothing. He Needs An Experience Similar to The One Ezekiel Had -(Ezekiel 3:14-19). And He Must Do What Ezekiel Did-

12. Negro Must Stop Forgetting His Friends. 'REMEMBER.'³⁰

Burroughs believed that all persons have a right to receive an education. Like Freire, she understood education as not merely for "persons who had the privilege of going to college; she thought also of its availability to men and women in the humblest walks of life....Her thoughts dwelt especially upon women and girls in this disadvantaged group."³¹ Burroughs was a strong advocate for intellectual development, as was W. E. B. Dubois. W. E. B. DuBois believed in the talented tenth theory. The talented tenth are those persons who are considered the brightest and who will become educated and help those who are not educated. Burroughs agreed with DuBois that the educated leaders need to take responsibility in the education of the people. Burroughs even states: "The leaders of the race must teach and inspire the masses to become eager and determined to improve mentally, morally and spiritually, and to meet the basic requirements of good citizenship."³² She is quite critical of educated persons' not trying to help those who

³⁰ Burroughs, Twelve Things the Negro Must Do, 9, 15, 18.

³¹ Mordecai W. Johnson, "Nannie Helen Burroughs," The Worker, October - December 1961, 7.

³² Burroughs, Twelve Things the Negro Must Do, 9.

are not educated. The educated persons have a responsibility to help others. This responsibility is to provide leadership and guidance. Burroughs states:

A race transforms itself through its own leaders and its sensible 'common people.' A race rises on its wings, or is held down by its own weight....There must arise within the Negro race a leadership that is not out hunting bargains and mass supported 'best positions' for itself. A noble example is found in the men and women of the Negro race, who, in the early days, laid down their lives for their people....³³

Burroughs points out that African Americans can provide their own leadership and guidance and go beyond the limits society has created. Educated persons pave the way for a future generation that will be able to reap the benefits of their hard work and, in turn, create a better future for others.

Unlike DuBois, Burroughs does not think only in terms of intellectual development. Burroughs wants people to believe that their intellectual gifts are not limited to academic pursuits, but also include everyday life tasks (e.g., cooking, cleaning, and sewing). Burroughs encouraged her students to strive to be their best through academic studies, vocational training, and the Bible.

Burroughs views education as a way to build confidence by helping people learn how to do for themselves. When persons realize that they can and must do for themselves, an important quality of knowing you are somebody is also cultivated. This sense of being somebody helps to instill a positive identity. Having a positive identity aids in developing a healthier attitude about who

³³ Ibid., 16.

you are. Hopefully, a better attitude means that persons will become better citizens, credits to the race, and Christians.

As mentioned earlier, the school's curriculum included such subjects as African American history, gardening, domestic sciences, and mathematics. Burroughs did not want the girls and women at the school to become dependent on others to support them financially. She encouraged them to think for themselves. Burroughs was very much aware of the sexism which existed in the society at large and in the African American community. Self-confidence, determination, racial pride, and God's love were emphasized in the curriculum. Through this type of encouragement and the courses, students were preparing to deal with the harsh realities of the world.

Burroughs encouraged persons to remember that opportunities are available for them, but they have to work hard. Some people will help you, but you have to prepare yourself. She admonishes African Americans to

REMEMBER In spite of race prejudice, America is brim full of opportunities. GO AFTER THEM!³⁴

Another important component in education is education and justice. Burroughs does an excellent critique of the social ills in this country and how to address these problems. Burroughs states, "Education and justice are American democracy's only life insurance. Without these, expensive armament is so much junk and high preachments about democracy is so much bunk."³⁵ While

³⁴ Burroughs, Twelve Things the Negro Must Do, 20.

³⁵ Burroughs, Think on These Things, 55.

Burroughs has high praise for the potential of America for all persons, she is accurately critical of America's racial prejudice. She also is quite critical of African Americans feeling too comfortable and not willing to challenge themselves or the system.

An example of this is presented below:

In rich America, we have preventable, staggering and challenging problems of ignorance, poverty, unemployment, health, crime and human waste, due largely to race prejudice on the one hand and Negro complacency on the other. No nation that calls itself a Christian democracy is as rich in race prejudice as America is today.... America is doomed unless she practices the principles of Democracy and Justice at home.³⁶

Burroughs' educational process is under the umbrella theme of self-help. This includes developing the mind, body, and religious dimension of a person. Education is one of the tools that Burroughs believes will help African Americans to become better persons and a better race physically, mentally, and spiritually.

The development of character traits is another aspect of Burroughs' learning process. Cleanliness is emphasized throughout Burroughs' work. From her perspective, keeping clean and being clean are important to developing a good character. Becoming a better person and a better citizen and a better Christian are interrelated. In the African American community, the old adage, "Cleanliness is next to Godliness" has been repeated to children over the years by their mothers. Quite a few mothers still tell this to their children on a regular basis. The repetition was so frequent that I, like many others, thought this saying was in the

³⁶ Ibid., 59.

Bible. One day, I looked through the Bible to find the scripture, but to no avail. For Burroughs, cleanliness and Godliness work together, and this is demonstrated within the school curriculum.

Burroughs stresses cleanliness as one way African Americans can make themselves responsible to themselves, others, and God. In step three, Burroughs states: "The Negro Must Keep Himself, His Children and His Home Clean and Make The Surroundings in Which He Lives Comfortable and Attractive."³⁷ Each person has a responsibility to keep clean and not smell. The body, clothes, hair, and personal surroundings are not to be abused by keeping them filthy. Burroughs even declares that bathing is a "personal right, but body odor (smell) is a public offense."³⁸ Also, her book entitled A National Crusade Working to Improve American Life on All Fronts, has a section on how to clean your home--"How To Turn a House into Home." This section discusses why and how children should develop personal cleanliness and how to clean a house--room by room--as well as the furniture each room should have.³⁹

Keeping the community clean is also important. Burroughs writes, "He must learn to 'run his community up'--not down.... Civilization is not a matter of race, it is a matter of standards."⁴⁰ Order and cleanliness can help those who live in

³⁷ Burroughs, Twelve Things the Negro Must Do, 6.

³⁸ Burroughs, Think on These Things, 130.

³⁹ Burroughs, A National Crusade, 14-28.

⁴⁰ Burroughs, Twelve Things the Negro Must Do, 6.

segregated neighborhoods, to realize that they do have the power to control their community. This power provides people with the opportunity to know that laws may dictate where you live, but how you live is left up to you.

Learning how to dress is a part of developing good character traits. Knowing how to dress is important because how a person looks is one way (good or bad) that she or he is judged. Burroughs writes in step four, "The Negro Must Learn To Dress More Appropriately For Work, For Business, For Special Occasions And For Leisure."⁴¹ Dressing appropriately shows others you have the ability to make good decisions and to be adaptable in various situations.

Burroughs believes that developing good character traits will help to eradicate the race problem. One way to eradicate the race problem Burroughs believes is to recognize that "good service and good conduct...will make senseless race prejudice fade like mist before the rising sun."⁴² I do not agree with her in this. Racism is deeply embedded in this country, and, though being clean may cause some persons to treat you differently, it will not change the overall problems of racism. Yet, I do agree with her basic belief that cleanliness is a way to help create pride within yourself.

Another method is for the African American to develop skills which are acceptable and marketable in the job market. She states, "he will never become a vital factor in industry until he learns to

⁴¹ Ibid., 7.

⁴² Ibid.

put into his work the vitalizing force of initiative, skill and dependability."⁴³ She wants people not to advocate always for their rights and refuse to take responsibility for things they can change and do. Keeping a job is one way to show you are responsible and willing to work. Therefore, Burroughs thinks that "The Negro Must Stop Charging His Failures Up To His 'Color' And To White People's Attitudes."⁴⁴ African Americans have to stop thinking that their problems are solely because of their skin color and white people's attitudes toward them. Being responsible for what you do is important and being prepared to do your best better and give you your best are what counts.

Finally, Burroughs' cleanliness emphasis helps to instill a sense of self-respect. Personal cleanliness has always been a part of the African American community. It is not a value that only the dominant society has. Yet, during Burroughs' day and today, African Americans are not thought of as clean people. This is ironic because the labor to maintain the upkeep and sanitary conditions of the dominant group has, for the most part, been by done by African Americans.

Economic Self-Sufficiency

Another part of the practical component of the learning process comes under the umbrella of economic self-sufficiency. Economic self-sufficiency is more than just making money for survival. The financial aspect is important, but the social

⁴³ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 10.

dimensions of education, employment, religion, and housing are directly related to economics. Burroughs realizes the economic and political power that wealthy persons have. These persons make decisions which affect other persons' lives; such as, where other persons will live, the types of jobs they will have, and how much money they will make. Burroughs wanted African Americans to be economically self-sufficient because she realized the need to take care one's self in a society that treated persons as second class citizens. She knew that African Americans would have to secure their own present and future economic and political security through acquiring their own economic means.

In the Twelve Things the Negro Must Do for Himself, Burroughs presents two steps which speak to her concern for economic self-sufficiency among African Americans. The first one is number eight: "The Negro Must Overcome His Bad Job Habits."⁴⁵ Economic self-sufficiency is necessary for the survival of the race. Burroughs believes that one way to gain economic self-sufficiency is for African-Americans to develop better job habits. Improving these habits will help to keep a job. Burroughs thought that too many persons have a "bad reputation for conduct on the job-such as petty quarreling with help, incessant loud talking about nothing; loafing, carelessness, due to lack of job pride;...."⁴⁶ These bad habits give a bad reputation to others. This bad impression keeps others from being able to find a job. Also, keeping a job means

⁴⁵ Burroughs, Twelve Things the Negro Must Do, 12.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

economic security. Economic security means that a person will be able to take care of the basic necessities of life, food, clothing, and shelter without depending on others.

Another aspect of economic self-sufficiency involves learning how to operate a business. Operating a business will provide economic security and independence for African Americans. Step ten of Burroughs' twelve steps is, "The Negro Must Learn How To Operate Business for People-Not For Negro People Only."⁴⁷ Burroughs thinks it is important for this to happen so that African Americans will be able to compete in the business world. Becoming a business person provides an opportunity to contribute time and talent for others to share. Work helps builds a person's character, and this leads toward becoming a better person.

In closing, the learning process for Burroughs is more than just learning how to read, write, spell, and think critically. Like Freire, Burroughs wants to improve the living conditions of the people. The harsh and cruel conditions of racial prejudice, sexism, and segregation, created the environment under which African Americans had to live. Legalized slavery had been ended only 50 years or so at the time Burroughs was writing, and African Americans were forced to carve out a new life. With this new life came new responsibilities (e.g., locating housing and employment), and very few would help them to make this transition. Burroughs did her best to design and assist African Americans in learning how to survive and receive more out of life than hard times. Her

⁴⁷ Ibid., 14.

learning process which draws together Christianity, educational method, character development, and economic self-sufficiency, is a blueprint for how to improve one's life in spite of the barriers and limitations imposed by society and self.

Critique

Burroughs down-home understanding of a learning process is quite clear and direct. There is no need to second guess what she means and how she means to say it. Many of her thoughts and actions foreshadow contemporary black liberation theologians. For example, her stress on the church as a vehicle for liberation and on the liberation of men and women are two powerful concepts that Burroughs incorporates into her life and work. So many of her twelve steps and beliefs ring true today. In the classroom and church, themes of cleanliness of self, family, and the neighborhood; economic development; and practicing religious values are echoed.

On the one hand, Burroughs offers good common sense and practical advice. Yet, the criticism I have is that, because of her lack of formal academic training, the framework from which to construct a learning theory from Burroughs' thoughts and educational understanding has not been formulated fully. Burroughs is practical and driven to outline and implement what she thinks African Americans need to do. The unfortunate part is that persons in the academic circles who could benefit from her advice will ignore it or not take it as a serious contribution to the educational field because she is not an academician.

The other criticism is that Burroughs puts too much faith in believing that whites will accept African Americans if they are clean and if they develop other good character traits which are acceptable to whites. There may be more tolerance of African Americans by whites if they make a certain presentation, but this will not change racist structures. The positive aspect of developing good character traits is the emphasis on learning to have confidence in oneself and racial pride. As persons develop a sense of who they are, this will help to bring togetherness among African Americans. The collective spirit and belief in African Americans as a people (and not as a second rate people) will help to promote racial pride.

Finally, although Burroughs lacks the formal educational training to be an academician, she is someone from whom educators can learn. Burroughs offers insightful and sound advice on how to address what whites and African Americans need to do to make a difference in the quality of life for all persons and bring about better race relationships. Her sense of commitment and belief that African Americans have much to contribute is expressed most profoundly throughout her work.

CHAPTER 6

Summary of Contributions by Freire and Burroughs

Common Contributions

Through their theories of learning, both Freire and Burroughs offer important elements for constructing a religious education program for African American children who are hearing impaired. The deaf, like the South American underclass and African Americans, understand actions of prejudice and the difficulty of attaining proper education. In light of this, both writers speak to the conditions of the African American hearing impaired, particularly those whose conditions are further oppressed by class or racial status. African American children who are hearing impaired are very much in need of a strong and positive religious education program. Freire's and Burroughs' work suggests the following elements which are needed in this religious education program--self-respect, a positive self-image, determination, a strong Christian foundation, and awareness of the social and cultural reality. These elements are necessary in constructing a creative and encouraging religious education program for children, especially for African American and deaf children.

Both educators encourage persons to go beyond the limits which others have set for them. Children who are hearing impaired are sometimes taught by society "that people with disabilities were 'special,' and parents and others gave special clues about how 'they' should be treated."¹ Freire and Burroughs advocate persons

¹ Froschl et al., 16.

who are oppressed pushing forward and make changes for a better society. The barriers of society are not excuses for not creating change. Neither educator wants persons to be comfortable or complacent and accept what society has designated as the "oppressed" person's place.

Freire and Burroughs are both grounded in the Christian tradition and values. Their belief in God's love and how God wants us to love ourselves and others is important for children to know and experience. Burroughs and Freire are advocates for those who are considered outsiders, a strong value in the Christian tradition. Their fight to encourage the oppressed to be proud of themselves, have self-confidence, and respect who they are should be reflected in the design of a religious education program. Each person and group has something to contribute to society and can make a difference in the social well-being, no matter how minute the contribution.

Both Freire and Burroughs are liberation educators. Freire advocates literacy as a way for persons who are oppressed to challenge the oppressor and the system. By learning to read, persons are able to have a sense of power and control of their lives. As they learn how to read and write, Freire emphasizes critical thinking among the students. Learning to think critically enables persons to analyze and understand their reality. In understanding their reality, they will see what needs to change, and they will make changes for the good of the people. The oppressed, according to Freire, will always do the right thing for

everyone once they have the power. Literacy is a powerful tool which can be abused or used in educating people. Freire wants to encourage people to use their reading, writing, and critical thinking skills to transform the oppressive system in which they live. Their voices can break the silence which supports their bondage.

Burroughs and Freire both want persons to believe in themselves and their abilities to make a difference. Burroughs emphasizes that African Americans need to develop self-esteem, pride, and a positive self-image. These characteristics are needed to provide them with a strong foundation to face the difficult barriers in life. Freire also emphasizes this in his work. Persons need these qualities to face what society has forced upon them and to fight against these limitations. Justice and education are important to both educators. Education provides a tool for bringing justice to all by enabling individuals to learn how to live together and respect each other's culture. Education gives persons an opportunity to dialogue about what needs to change and how to change it. Freire and Burroughs believes this will happen if the oppressed keep pushing forward with their thirst for knowledge. Supposedly, justice will come about because oppressed persons will have proven they are equal to others through their education. The oppressor cannot continue to be unjust if the oppressed do not allow this to happen. Education is a key to teaching the oppressed and the oppressor what they need to do for transformation to take place.

Both Freire and Burroughs are strongly grounded in their religious beliefs, and these beliefs inform their thoughts and actions. They both advocate the destruction of the dehumanizing relationships which are not a part of God's relationship with humanity. Freire and Burroughs want people to relate to each other with love and respect. This love and respect is rooted in God's love for humanity. This love requires each of us to take care of ourselves and others in a healthy manner and not hurt one another.

Burroughs and Freire are staunch proponents of education for adults, but Burroughs stressed the need to educate boys, girls and women in particular. Education for Burroughs included academic, vocational, and religious training. Burroughs addressed the issue of being oppressed within an oppressed group. Burroughs was also a religious educator. She designed programs to help educate all age groups to become better Christians. For example, Burroughs designed and published The Worker, a devotion magazine for adults, as well as devotional programs for children, and a how-to guide for missionaries.

Finally, these educators offer hope for a better future within their particular societies, and hope that a transformation in society will soon come. This transformation can take place only if the oppressed are willing to fight and the oppressor willing to give up some of the power. Their dream of a better society is still a dream of today.

Contribution of Differences

In spite of their similarities, there are some differences

between these two educators. First, each places emphasis on their own target audience. Burroughs emphasizes the education of girls in particular although she targeted the adult population as well. Freire, on the other hand, emphasizes the adult population of his community. While he sees the need for children to begin their nurturing and education at an early age, Freire focuses his attention on the power that adults who are considered powerless need to gain. Literacy becomes the avenue by which he explores the work of consciousness-raising. Burroughs examines how African Americans in particular can work toward making lives better for themselves and how whites can stop dehumanizing African Americans.

Freire is much more open and encourages people to think through problems and come up with solutions for themselves. Group sharing and processing is an important part of his strategy. If people can learn to listen to one another and share ideas with one another, then trust and strength within the group can emerge. Burroughs, on the other hand, has devised plans and provides outlines for how persons should interact and think about their particular situations. The focus is more on giving people practical, how-to-do advice which will help to change and better their lives. This includes how to take notes at meetings and how to conduct business matters. Many of her practical steps of advice could be used by many people today. While Freire encourages more freedom for people to think, Burroughs is much clearer about what values to communicate and more structured in giving people the detailed solutions to their problems.

Burroughs and Freire are both very much steeped in their respective religious beliefs. Freire's belief stresses the Godliness in all of us and the importance of persons not being dehumanized. Burroughs believes this also, but she is very much a part of the Bible culture, and black Baptist tradition can be quite conservative in its beliefs on how people should dress and behave. She sees the value of every action in the quality of human life.

**Part Three: Resourcing Religious Education for African
American Children Who Are Hearing Impaired**

CHAPTER 7

Black Theology and Black History as
Resources for Religious Education

This chapter discusses how black theology, black history, and the educational activities of the church can serve as resources for Christian education. First, definitions of education and Christian education are given. These will give a working understanding of how this writer understands education and Christian education. Next, a brief discussion is provided concerning what the Christian faith is and how the educational process of the faith is an intricate and necessary part of communicating the faith to others. These areas will serve as the background in discussing how black history, black theology, and the various activities of the church are resources for Christian education.

Jack L. Seymour and Donald E. Miller define education in their book Theological Approaches to Christian Education.

Education defines a people. It involves the processes by which a community, society, or nation clarifies and communicates the values and commitments (the paideia, or ideals) fundamental to itself as a people....Simply put, education is about passing on a tradition and participating in the re-creation of that tradition.¹

Therefore, from an educational perspective, religious education is passing on the traditions of the Christian faith story, which are inclusive of the various stories of people within the Christian faith. This also involves the active participation of persons in

¹ Jack L. Seymour and Donald Miller, "Openings to God: Education and Theology in Dialogue." in Theological Approaches to Christian Education, eds. Jack Seymour and Donald Miller (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 8.

creating a just, loving, and merciful community.

Christian education is the way by which the church helps people understand and seek God's love, justice, grace, and liberating power through knowledge of the Judeo-Christian experience, their own experiences within their respective communities, and the experiences of others. In essence, Christian education is concerned with persons learning "To do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly before God" (Micah 6:8). The mission of the whole church is education. Christian religious education is the church's medium for passing on the Judeo-Christian faith. Knowing the faith is communicated and lived in the lives of persons who profess to be Christians is important to persons as they learn and articulate the faith. The learning and expression of Christianity is found in the doctrines, the creeds, the scriptures, statements of faith, and the lived experiences of people. The Judeo-Christian story is the faith journey of a people who have and are articulating the revelation of God in their lives and whose understanding of God is shaped by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

How persons come to understand their faith and how they understand God is reflected in their common and unique interpretations of God. Jesus Christ serves as the foundation upon which the faith is built as persons actively seek to understand what it means to be in relationship with Christ and with God. The Kingdom of God is God's vision of reality as love, justice, and mercy on earth.

Living out the faith in relationship to others is shaped by what persons think and feel about God and Christ. These relationships affect how persons interact with one another and all of God's creation. How persons come to understand the activity of God and Christ in their lives as well as how persons interact with God is reflected in their theology and history. Theology and history are not isolated events or processes, but they are interwoven as part of the faith fabric of any religion. How persons understand their history affects their theological beliefs and how persons understand their theology affects their historical reflection.

Overview of Black History and Black Theology

Two resources for Christian education are theology and history. Both of these resources provide a deep well of water from which Christian education must draw. They both can serve as both liberating and oppressive forces within Christian education. Liberating education helps persons to engage in critical thinking and dialogue about various issues. It also encourages persons to take action to change oppressive societal structures. Oppressive education limits how persons develop their critical thinking skills and their interactions with others in order to create change. Oppressive education, unlike liberating education, does not include in its dialogue voices and experiences which are not part of what is considered the standard or acceptable way things are to be thought about.

History is a natural resource for Christian education because it offers events, thoughts, time, and experiences of people and nature interacting with one another individually and collectively to create a particular moment in time. The Random House Dictionary defines history as "a continuous, systematic narrative of past events as relating to a particular people, country, period, person, etc. usually written as a chronological account."² Additionally, history provides a mirror from which persons can see the past and how it may possibly impact the present and future. History can provide direction and guidance for what needs to be done now as well as passing on what has already been done. We cannot tell and re-create the Judeo-Christian story without uncovering or repeating particular stories and/or traditions which the faithful believe are facts and truth. The doctrines, creeds, and scriptures are examples of written testimonies of faith which undergird and support, what persons come to believe and learn about the faith.

Christian education, by its very nature, is a theological reflection of how and what people think about God. Christian education has often been thought of as

a technical and applied practical area within the theological encyclopedia. Rather, it is recognized that it has to do with basic questions of the meaning of the Christian faith, the meaning of theological education, and the role of the church in the education of the public."³

On the other hand, theology has often been thought of as a rational

² "History," Random House Dictionary of the English Language, 2nd ed., unabridged.

³ Seymour and Miller, 10.

study about God. Just as Christian education is becoming known as more than a practical application of theology, the understanding of what is theology has expanded. Theology is more than an exercise in mental gymnastics and interpretations. As James Cone states, "Christian theology is never just a rational study of the being of God. Rather, it is a study of God's liberating activity on behalf of the oppressed."⁴ Theology is God-talk which involves "two significant parties-people and God."⁵ It is concerned with how people understand God and their response to God's creation in light of their interpretation.

Like history, theology grows out of the experience of people. As Jacquelyn Grant states, "It involves our human interpretations of God and the Christian faith in our historical and contemporary settings."⁶ In essence, theology is the revelation of God through human thoughts and experiences. To say anything about the Christian faith is to speak about what people think about God's activity. Consequently, the structure and the foundation of theology for Christian religious education is important in its development. In light of this, Grant states:

Christian education resources are adequate when the theology which serves as their foundation is adequate. Bad theology produces bad Christian education resources; irrelevant theology produces irrelevant Christian education resources; oppressive theology produces oppressive resources....Christian education (indeed all

⁴ James Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation, 3rd ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 3.

⁵ Grant, "A Theological Framework," 56.

⁶ Ibid.

forms of ministry) has theological foundations. Ministry-its character, relevance, quality, and value-is determined by its theological foundation.⁷

Theology is a necessary part of Christian education because it provides a way of interpreting and understanding all aspects of the faith. It helps to inform Christian education as to what has been and are the on-going thoughts and activities from various sources related to faith.

Unfortunately, many of the dominant thoughts, theories, and beliefs, and practices of religion and history in the United States have often been rooted in the understanding and beliefs of one particular group of persons. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya in their new book The Black Church in the African American Experience, write:

The prevailing American sentiment has traditionally held that the mainline white churches constitute the only relevant spiritual pulse in the nation, and that whatever is outside this narrow ambit is of little if any significance to the American religious profile. This conventional wisdom is widely reflected in seminary curricula and denominational policies to the end that misperception is compounded, and the religious experience of some 30 to 35 million African Americans is clouded in consequence.⁸

The thoughts, beliefs, and practices of one group of persons should not serve as the only vehicle and model for religious education. Religious education should include the various theological and historical contexts of different racial and ethnic groups as the Christian story is passed on from generation to

⁷ Ibid., 56.

⁸ Lincoln and Mamiya, The Black Church in the African American Experience, xi.

generation. History should be inclusive of all of our stories, and theology should not be limited to one particular perspective. Yet, this has not always been viewed as an acceptable way of conceptualizing and practicing the faith.

Black theology and black history are two sources within Christian religious education which can guide us towards a deeper understanding of our faith. To begin with, the term black theology came into being in 1969. Initially, the National Council of Black Churches (NCBC) defined the term black theology as

a theology of liberation. It seeks to plumb the condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black theology is a theology of blackness. It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says no to the encroachment of white oppression.⁹

James Cone, who is considered the father of black theology, follows NCBC's definition in his articulation of black theology because it emphasizes the theme of liberation and affirms the humanity of African American people. Cone states that the "most original and lasting contribution of black theology, has been its ability to relate creatively the Christian faith and the black freedom struggle in American society."¹⁰ In light of this history of the African American church and its witness to how Christianity can and should address the oppressive conditions of African

⁹ James Cone, For My People (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984), 53.

¹⁰ Ibid., 79.

Americans, the fight for freedom became part of the Christian experience of African Americans. Some African American clergy began to question how the gospel of Jesus is relevant to the struggle of the African American fight for justice in America. As the scriptures were reread and God's continual act of liberation was clearly seen in the lives of those in Judeo-Christian faith, the theme of liberation for African Americans became even more pronounced.

Black theology's central theme of liberation is rooted in the belief that God is on the side of the oppressed. In recent years, the theme of liberation has been broadened to include economic, political, and social issues related to African Americans. Other issues such as sexism and ministry to black youth have become important aspects of black theology. These issues have been brought to the forefront by womanist theology. Womanist theology is the theological reflection of African American women in particular, but does not exclude concern for liberation of all oppressed people. Womanist theology emphasizes the experiences of African American women and relates these experiences. Also, womanist theology involves black women implementing theology which addresses issues related to classism. The significance of these three experiences is emphasized in Grant's belief that

Black women must do theology out of the tridimensional experience of racism/sexism/classism. To ignore any aspect of this experience is to deny the holistic and integrated reality of Black womanhood. When Black women say that God is on the side of the oppressed, we mean that God is in solidarity with the struggles of those on

the under side of humanity."¹¹

The theme of liberation is no longer heard and interpreted from a male perspective, but the voices of women have and are being included. Such women as Katie Canon, Jacquelyn Grant, and Kelly Brown are confronting and writing about black theology from a womanist perspective. Their voices, stories, and analysis will provide not only a challenging perspective for black theology, but will provide insight and guidance to Christian education in general as well.

The willingness to struggle and wrestle with difficult and demeaning structures is part of the history of black theology. From the beginning, black theologians would not back down from their belief that God is for all who are oppressed, therefore, God is for the liberation of African Americans. Black theologians began showing how the gospel of Christ reaffirmed their belief in the liberation of the oppressed: "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me to set the captives free" (Luke 4:18). Also, God's power to liberate the disenfranchised is included in God's salvation; for, human liberation for the poor and fighting for justice are God's ways. Black theology was able to emphasize how God's liberation is for all who are oppressed. In light of this,

the task of black theology, then, is to analyze the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ in light of oppressed blacks so they will see the gospel as inseparable from their humiliated condition, and as bestowing on them the necessary power to break the chains of oppression. This means that it is a theology of and

¹¹ Jacquelyn Grant, White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 209.

for the black community, seeking to interpret the religious dimensions of the forces of liberation in that community.¹²

As part of the Mosaic story of the Judeo-Christian experience, black theology and black history provide intellectual, spiritual, cultural, and practical insights and perspectives for the faith journey of Christians in general and African American people in particular. These two resources provide rich and needed information which children need to learn, digest, and use as a present and future guides for their lives. In general, the knowledge of history and the ability to learn from it is a powerful tool for anyone. Also, the connection between history and theology cannot be overlooked or understated. How persons' understand and interpret God's activity in their lives and the lives of others is connected to the historical context in which they live.

As J. Deotis Roberts notes, "History is a necessary aid to theological reflection."¹³ Black history and black theology give a context for shaping and interpreting the historical and theological framework within religious education. Because of the unique experience of African Americans as slaves for almost 400 years in this country, as well as other forms of legal and illegal racism, sexism, and political exploitation, the historical and theological experiences are intricately bound. Black history is one of the sources which black theology draws upon "because divine

¹² Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation, 5.

¹³ J. Deotis Roberts, Roots of a Black Future (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 64.

activity is inseparable from black history."¹⁴ As black theology analyzes, understands and reflects on the various events and movements in the lives of African Americans, God's revelations and activities are viewed in light of past, present, and future expectations. Cone states that by

taking seriously the reality of God's involvement in history, black theology asks, "what are the implications of black history for the revelation of God? Is God active in black history or had God withdrawn and left blacks to the mercy of white insanity?"¹⁵

These pointed questions are then asked in regard to the historical situation of African Americans in this country and how God is or is not actively participating in the life of the African American community. Asking such difficult questions is needed to help focus on the task of destroying the oppressive conditions and structures which cause persons to feel and think in dehumanizing ways.

The use of history and theology to analyze and interpret the religious expressions and thoughts of people is not a foreign concept to Christianity. The Judeo-Christian story is steeped in a history-theology framework which serves as a model for conceptualizing and shaping the faith story. For example, the resurrection event is a historical event, but is also an event of great theological significance for the Christian faith. This event provides the wellspring from which all persons can draw hope and strength because God has shown that all oppressed persons are included in God's liberating work. James Cone believes

¹⁴ Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation, 26.

¹⁵ Ibid., 27.

if the history of Israel and the New Testament description of the historical Jesus reveal that God is a God who is identified with Israel because it is an oppressed community, the resurrection of Jesus means that all oppressed people become his people. Herein lies the universal note that is implied in the gospel message of Jesus. The resurrection-event means that God's liberating work is not only for the house of Israel but for all who are enslaved by principalities and powers. The resurrection conveys hope in God.¹⁶

From historical and theological perspectives, God's activity in the lives of the oppressed gives hope to all and emphasizes the need for justice and mercy for all. God's liberating work in the resurrection event points to the creative and loving work of God through Christ Jesus. The liberation of oppressed people is continually expressed in God's active participation in the liberation of the oppressed.

History gives life to the theological witness of God's constant participation in the everyday and extraordinary experiences of people. In Olin Moyd's book, Redemption in Black Theology, he quotes Osmund Lewry regarding the relationship between Christian history and theology. Lewry states, "History,...should be a preoccupation of the Christian theologian because of the characteristic relationship between Christianity and history."¹⁷ Theology without the benefit of history does not provide adequate information and resources from which theologians can begin to interpret and learn about God's revelation to humanity.

¹⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷ Olin Moyd, Redemption in Black Theology (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1979), 29.

Black History

Every person and every community of people in the Christian faith have a story to tell about their life pilgrimage. It is a story that has relevance for the individual, the community, and the greater community of faith. Hearing the Christian story and the stories which are part of our faith journey is important in providing us with more than one way of understanding God's movement in our lives. Therefore, it is difficult to discuss anything about God without also referring to the history of what has happened and is happening in peoples' lives. God's movement in the Hebrew story is reflected in the historical and the theological interpretations of people. The Exodus experience is historical and theological. Slaves marching to freedom is a historical event as well as theological because it is an event which happened in the lives of the slaves because of God's guidance and direction in their freedom march. This historical event sets a precedent for God's active, continual, liberating participation in human events.

The history of African Americans is one of protest, resistance, struggle, and achievement. The story of African Americans within the United States and the Caribbean is very much a part of the historical fabric of this country. From philosophy to science to politics to religion, the creative mind and labor of African Americans have literally built and shaped the various segments of life in the United States and the Caribbean. "Black history, then, offers not only a broad framework for critically viewing and understanding Black people, but also a necessary

background perspective for critical insights into other subject areas of Black studies."¹⁸ Although black history has been successfully rewritten or excluded from many of the history books, the United States is deeply indebted to the minds, bodies, and souls of African Americans who shed their blood and dedicated their lives to building this country.

The absence of one race's story is an injustice to that racial community and the greater community. This idea is not a new concept. In 1925, R. A. Morrissey, a minister, noted the importance of history and its application for African Americans in particular. Morrissey stated:

Every foremost race of people in the world today has its history written by its own members. To keep this universal rule, colored people should be no exception....Especially so because the information as well as inspiration will lead their own group toward nobler aspirations and higher ideals in life's activities...The Negro has a history of which he need not be ashamed but he will wait a long time for a white man to write this history in fairness for the consumption of the great white public.¹⁹

Within the story of the Christian faith, the absence of contributions from African Americans to Christianity in the United States has been a tragic part of the religious heritage of this country. There are several persons and events in the history of African Americans which have contributed to creating a new and just order. Such persons as Gabriel Prosser and Harriet Tubman are examples of individuals who stood for justice and helped to rewrite

¹⁸ Karenga, Introduction to Black Studies, 43.

¹⁹ Cain Hope Felder, Troubling Biblical Waters (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989), xii.

history. Both of these generals and deliverers believed that God had called and guided them to break the shackles of slavery upon their people. Since Christian education draws from history to retell the story of God's active participation in the lives of the oppressed, the stories of such religious and freedom fighter leaders of the Christian faith as Harriet Tubman and Gabriel Prosser deserve to be included.

Gabriel Prosser believed that as a child he had been called by God to deliver the people from slavery. He often would make reference to the biblical hero Sampson (Judges 15 and 16) as a model for how he (Gabriel) had been given a divine calling to bring about the destruction of slavery and freedom for the slaves. The successful revolution led by Toussaint L'Overture in Haiti gave inspiration and served as a model for Gabriel's plans. Although L'Overture's strategy provided Gabriel with a model for his own plans, Wilmore writes that "religious factors played a more important role in justifying the Gabriel insurrection than in the one led by L'Overture."²⁰ Scholars have learned that Gabriel's plans were well organized. Unfortunately, there were persons who betrayed the plans of the revolt to their slave masters. This led to the hanging of several slaves, one suicide, and persons fleeing for their lives. Eventually, Gabriel, who had been hiding on a schooner, was betrayed. He was arrested on September 24, 1800, and put to death on October 7.

²⁰ Gayraud Wilmore, Black Religion and Black Radicalism (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), 55.

Harriet Tubman was called the Moses of her people. Tubman had accepted and followed her calling. Like Gabriel, she believed that God had called her to deliver her people from slavery. She was one of the leading conductors of the underground railroad and led more than 300 persons to freedom. Tubman was never caught or arrested. According to legend, Tubman once said, "I never lost a passenger."

Both Gabriel and Tubman are examples of how religion has served as an important influence in the lives of African Americans.

Utilizing the resources of black history, such as the faith journeys of Tubman and Gabriel, can creatively work to develop a better understanding of the faith. One way to include black history within Christian education is outlined by Nathan Jones in his book Sharing the Old, Old Story: Educational Ministry within the Black Community. He outlines four areas which he thinks can be included in developing a framework for Christian education within the African American church: (1) black pilgrimage, (2) vision, (3) the Bible, and (4) community of faith.²¹ Jones, a Christian educator, states that these are components which serve as guiding principles for a liberation-oriented educational ministry. I think these principles can also serve as guidelines for designing and implementing a liberation-oriented educational program within the African American church. Jones' principles are also complemented and undergirded with the reconstruction of black theology.

Jones' first principle, black pilgrimage, reflects the need

²¹ Nathan Jones, Sharing the Old, Old Story: Educational Ministry in the Black Community (Winona, Minn.: Saint Mary's Press, 1982), 20-24.

for the history and the experiences of African Americans to be included in the retelling of the Christian story. The hard and rough journey of African Americans from the slave ships to the present day is the story of a people collectively and individually. The African and African American experiences, issues, culture, values, and heritage are part of retelling the Christian story. From a Christian education perspective, these stories must be connected with the biblical witness and how God has been present then and now in the lives of African American people. The stories of African Americans and the biblical history are not separate stories, but one story. "If black churches are once again to reclaim their historic freedom-orientation, significant strides to reconnect the biblical and black stories must be made. Indeed, they are not two stories but rather one continual flowering of God's revelation."²²

Christian education in the African American church must continue to relate to the everyday experiences of the people and ask the question, what is "God's message in the raw details and daliness of our lives?"²³ Hearing and discovering what God has to say today is important. Jones describes the pilgrimage of black people as being concerned with empowerment for all ages of black people and the positive consequences of this empowerment. Jones states that the concept "Black pilgrimage in Christian education" is about empowering persons to get in touch with their own personal

²² Ibid., 20.

²³ Ibid.

stories --the highlands and lowlands--and to claim them. Without a doubt, such formation develops a sense of self-worth, self-esteem, and self-respect in adults, youth, and children."²⁴

Christian education must work towards helping persons to eliminate the self-hate that often becomes a part of African Americans. The strengths and weaknesses of African Americans need to be discussed. Identifying these strengths and weaknesses through discussions on the porch, in open forums at the church, and in other places can remind us of who we are and begin to build a sense of community among God's people. "It is by standing back from daily experience and reflecting upon it that each of us is more fittingly equipped to act."²⁵

The black pilgrimage provides us the opportunity to look at how the Bible, the tradition of the church, the faith story, and the everyday experiences of black people are connected. This is expressed in "the black cultural adaptation of the extended family (where if one eats, all eat; if one has a home, all have a home) and is invariably related to the New Testament concept of koinonia, fellowship where we enter as strangers and leave as friends."²⁶

Jones writes that to "Black and pilgrim people this means":

to be connected to all God's sojourners who have journeyed before us, especially our ancestors in the Blood. They have passed on the flame of faith and freedom. We are one with them.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 21.

²⁶ Jones, 21.

the life and breath of the people are dependent on the one who has made them. As God's anawim, we stand under the Word ever disposed to listen and receive from the generous hand of God.

to be always on the way, unfinished, never perfect until we, out of our exile, come home. Be patient; God's not finished with us yet!²⁷

Black history as a resource for Christian education gives persons the opportunities to learn and explore new ideas and visions for understanding how God has worked and continues to work in the lives of people. Learning and understanding the faith through the eyes and experiences of African Americans broadens the framework of the Christian faith and nudges people to look at their understanding of the faith on a different and deeper level.

Black Theology

Theology is a necessary part of Christian education because it provides a way of explaining the doctrines, history, experiences, and values related to the church, God, and Christ. Theology is defined as a systematic approach which uses the mind to explicate the Christian faith. Yet, black theology discusses not only how persons think about God within the Christian faith, it also emphasizes the active participation of a people in their faith and God's active participation in their faith through the liberating message of the gospel.

Black theology can undergird a Christian education program in the African American church. As Grant Shockley states, "Religious education and liberation theology can find a common base in their

²⁷ Jones, 21.

common task, namely, to respond to the call to social engagement by God who is fully social and radically present in the world."²⁸ Black theology and Christian education in the African American church are both concerned with the total being of the person being liberated. Freedom for persons to live their lives to the fullest degree of humanity is a component of black theology and the Christian faith. God's participation in the liberation of people is part of the educational process of the church.

Educator Olivia Pearl Stokes also emphasizes the need for Christian education in the black church to use the knowledge gained from black theology. In her article, "Education in the black Church: Design for Change," she writes:

Thus, education in the black church, with insights from black theology, must become a part of that indispensable structure for survival and transformation that ameliorates those societal ills which the Christian faith is committed to remedy. Education in the black church must also give its members an opportunity for the self-understanding of blackness, a sense of black personhood as well as assistance in the development of the black community's goals and programs."²⁹

This educational goal for the African American church is not limited to, or exclusive of, one particular group of people. Through black theology, all people can learn and develop a deeper sense of their faith as well as a better understanding of the faith

²⁸ Grant S. Shockley, "The Pastor's Role in Religious Education for Social Justice," in The Pastor as Religious Educator, ed. Robert L. Browning (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1989), 196.

²⁹ Olivia Pearl Stokes, "Education in the Black Church," in Who Are We?, ed. John Westerhoff (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1978), 25.

of others. Because part of the mission and the task of the faith for Christian education is to help persons become liberated, Stokes provides a framework for relating black theology within the Christian experience. Stokes lists several objectives for Christian education which incorporates black theology. The following is a list of some of her objectives:

- 1) To study the dialogue in black theology, in the context of the Christian faith, in order to help persons become aware of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, the liberator.
- 2) To help black people know why they are and what their human situation is in the American society.
- 3) To enable persons to investigate and evaluate the historical black religious experience, beginning with Africa, through slavery, into the contemporary urban society, and to seek its relevance for life today. To share with white Americans, and all God's people, the God-given black experience of the Christian faith; and
- 4) To enable and equip black children, black youth and black adults to discover their divinely created human potential.³⁰

These objectives serve as guidelines for how Christian education within the black church can be constructed and implemented through an educational program based on developing a working relationship with black theology. This relationship will help to establish a broader base which Christian education in the church, and the African American church, in particular, can utilize in constructing and implementing the liberating message of the church through the gospels.

An important theme in black theology is human freedom. Understanding human freedom is reflected in one of the essential and ultimate questions of humanity, "Who are we?" This question

³⁰ Ibid., 58.

not only raises the issue of how humanity understands itself but also humanity understands itself in relationship to God. As Jacquelyn Grant writes:

The 'who are we?' question has bearing upon who we say God is. The doctrine of humanity then is of utmost importance for comprehending the meaning of God, because human beings are responsible for theological concepts. The concepts, based upon our interpretations of the gospel, reflect the lived experiences of people. Historically, the experiences has been an oppressive one for black people, primarily because God, rather than being viewed as liberator, was used as a dominating unmerciful oppressor who demanded submission from His subjects.³¹

Understanding who we are is connected to our human freedom because this belief gives us the blueprint for how we will act and think about God, ourselves, and others. This is crucial to how persons choose to live their lives. As Grant notes: "God as the chief agent of liberation is a critical affirmation, but what is of equal importance is the doctrine of humanity. The 'Who are we?' question has bearing upon who we say God is."³² Consequently, the doctrine of humanity is important to how persons understand who God is in relation to how they understand who they are. If God is thought of as a just and loving God, then God's actions will be seen this way. If God is seen as dominating and oppressive, then God's actions will be seen as expectations from a being who demands submission from God's objects. Therefore, persons who think less of themselves will believe they are inferior and are to be subjects to those who have set themselves up as superior creatures.

³¹ Grant, "A Theological Framework," 58.

³² Ibid.

Christian educator Thomas Groome emphasizes in his work the importance of human freedom with which the Kingdom (realm) of God is ultimately concerned. Groome stresses the need for persons to strive for freedom in three areas: spiritual, personal, and social/political. The third dimension is akin to the liberation-human freedom goal which is emphasized in black theology. In Groome's third dimension of human freedom, persons struggle against the sinful social structures which limit human freedom (e.g., economic, political, and cultural structures). The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ provide the power which humanity needs to fight against these oppressive structures.

Groome's understands that the Kingdom of God, as lived out in the Christian faith, has as its ultimate end human freedom. "Such faith is grounded in human freedom, and the fruit of it is to live within and for freedom, both here and hereafter."³³ Human freedom and Christian faith are bound together and one does not exist without the other. Christian faith and human freedom draw from each other and provide life to one another. The Christian faith calls for people to live lives which do not keep them chained to oppressive structures and situations and to live out their humanity as freely as possible. Groome advocates human freedom which is empowering and which frees persons to live their lives according to God's will. If persons do not develop a healthy sense of who they are, then they will restrict themselves from achieving their full

³³ Thomas Groome, Christian Religious Education (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 82.

humanity. Freire discusses how oppressed people are fearful of taking responsibility because they either believe that are not to have any real authority or control over their lives or they have opted to accept, act, and think as the dominant culture. Consequently, oppressed people often leave decision making to the oppressors. If people are unable or unwilling to speak out for their rights and to act upon them, they will never be able to obtain their freedom.

Christianity has often nurtured and cultivated sexism. These biased attitudes and behaviors have been handed down through the educational process of the church. Therefore, Christian education is subject to the sexist biases against women. The issue of sexism within the church has been challenged by various persons. As people work towards human freedom, then sexism must be addressed not only in the community and the workplace but also in the church.

As previously noted, womanist theology addresses issues related to sexism. One such issue is the images used to describe the relationship of Christ and women in the Bible. Presently, womanist theology emphasizes the importance of Christology. How African American women understand Jesus is crucial to their understanding of the gospel. Unlike black theology which, as previously discussed, has traditionally not used biblical accounts of Jesus' interaction with women as examples of God's relationship with the oppressed, womanist theology highlights these experiences. These experiences emphasize how Jesus is working in and for the liberation of women as well as men. The emphasis on Jesus is an

important aspect in the theme of liberation.

According to Jacquelyn Grant, feminist theology is also not adequate for Black women because it is racist. Grant does not make a blanket statement that every feminist theologian is racist; yet, she does believe that feminist theology by nature is racist because of the power which white women have as a result of racism. Grant highlights this when she cites the following statement by Joel Kovel. "In a racist society, the oppressor assumes the power of definition and control while the oppressed is objectified and perceived as a thing."³⁴ This is evident within feminist theology because, "White women have defined the movement and presumed to do so not only for themselves but also for non-White women. They have misnamed themselves by calling themselves feminist when in fact they are White feminists...."³⁵

For black theology, the images of Christ and the Bible play an important role. For instance, both Cone and Roberts discuss the importance of the image of Christ. Their emphasis is from a male perspective. Grant broadens the significance of Christ as she presents the different issues related to Christology from a womanist perspective. The role of Jesus and the Bible are two important elements in both black theology and womanist theology as discussed by Grant. Both elements are discussed in light of their

³⁴ Joel Kovel, White Racism: A Psychohistory (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), as quoted in Jacquelyn Grant, White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus, 199-200.

³⁵ Ibid.

historical and theological significance. Grants emphasizes how understanding the Bible and Jesus are necessary to black women because they both offer hope and freedom from the various forms of oppression. She encourages womanist theology to look to the direction and guidance of the Bible and Jesus from the past and to see how this applies to the present and future as well.

Unlike theologians such as J. DeOtis Roberts, James Cone, or Cecil Cone, Grant applies the concepts of black theology for black youth. In a chapter entitled, "A Theological Framework," Grant discusses the need for black youth to develop a strong sense of identity and to believe in themselves. She discusses how black theology addresses the issue of identity and experiences in black people which help to inform their understanding of humanity. Black youth need to have a healthy sense of their humanity to help them cope with life. Grant writes, "Black theology affirms the essential humanity of black people as a necessary step in the process of liberation. It is a step the church must take to engage in a liberating ministry to and for its youth."³⁶ Black theology, as well as other theologies, usually focus on the thoughts and experiences of adults. (Even this is sometimes limited to certain adults.) Grant provides a more holistic approach to theology by addressing youth. Hopefully, other black theologians will engage in writing and constructing models for discussing and applying theology with youth. The crisis in our community and country calls for everyone to help create a healthier reality.

³⁶ Grant, "A Theological Framework," 59.

Conclusion

Christian education draws from a variety of resources to tell the faith story. The Christian tradition includes scripture, theology, culture, and history; all of these are rich seeds from which Christian education is nurtured. These provide resources which Christian education can utilize. How these resources are interpreted and put into practice must be taken into consideration in any educational process. No educational process is neutral. Paulo Freire stresses this throughout his work in the field of education. Education for Freire is never neutral because it takes place within a particular social context. Freire recognizes that the church is a part of the social reality, so education in the church is a part of this reality. In reflecting on

the Churches, or education, or the Churches' work in education, you must remember that they are situated in real history. For the Churches are not timeless abstractions, but institutions inserted into history; education too takes place in the flow of history; similarly, the Churches' educational efforts are always conditioned by the concrete, historical reality into which the Churches are plunged.³⁷

The history and theology of a people play a major role in influencing part of their culture. Within the Christian faith in the United States, the culture helps to shape how we understand our faith. Our culture shapes our worldview, beliefs, and relationships, defining the parameters of our faith.

African Americans can draw from the resources of black history

³⁷ Paulo Freire, "The Educational Role of the Churches in Latin America," Pasos, 7 October 1972, n.p.

and black theology to better understand their past, present, and future. Additionally, learning about who we are can also give direction as to who we shall be. This is very much affected by how we understand God and how we relate to creation. Consequently, understanding our history and presenting it in such a way as to show our strengths and weaknesses will set the stage for developing a healthier attitude about ourselves as African Americans.

The words of the great historian and educator Carter G. Woodson are relevant for us today as we prepare for our present and future responsibilities as educators. He once stated:

If you can control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his action. When you determine what a man shall think you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself. If you make a man think that he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one.³⁸

He recognized that in the United States, by teaching only the history of the white man, the dominant culture can retain its place of superiority and those considered inferior will think of themselves as insignificant. These thoughts will breed failure and the belief that "the subjection of his will to some other race is necessary"; thus, "he would still be a slave."³⁹

Unfortunately, his words still ring true today. The need to broaden the imaginations and beliefs of African Americans about

³⁸ Carter G. Woodson, The Mis-Education of the Negro (1933; reprint, Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1990), 55.

³⁹ Ibid., 42.

their own intrinsic worth is vital for them to develop a good sense of who they are. The task of Christian education is to help persons develop this sense by providing them with information, experiences, and spiritual guidance. So often, the church is guilty of only giving people partial truth about the faith or creating images which do not reflect a full picture. For example, many children grow up believing that Jesus is blonde and blue-eyed because these are the images that they see. Jesus is often pictured as an Anglo-Saxon in this culture, but this picture limits how Jesus may have looked; it emphasizes that Godliness is whiteness and not reflected in non-whites.

Finally, as stated before, the faith education process must not be seen as the territory or the responsibility of one group of persons. The church must continue to challenge, reinterpret, and help individuals to live as free and healthy persons. The death and resurrection of Christ gives the impetus and the power to the witness that God is on the side of the oppressed and that persons are called to choose life and not death. In choosing life, persons can begin to hear how such sources as black theology and black history retell the story of the faith. Black history and black theology offer guidance. They challenge African American people to see themselves as people of value in relationship to God and others.

The preceding section began by addressing the liberating aspect of black history and black theology by first defining history and theology in their broad meanings. Next, black history

and black theology were defined in their respective contexts. In this section, the oppressive aspects or limitations of black history and black theology will be examined. It begins by discussing some aspects of how history is oppressive in general and how black history and black theology can be viewed as oppressive or limiting.

History has been the teacher of many positive lessons and events. Unfortunately, history has also been used to cover up many negative situations. Three oppressive or limiting characteristics of history are exclusion, the lack of the written word, and who has the authority to tell the history. Exclusion refers to the voices and stories of persons considered inferior or not relevant to a particular event. For example, Native Americans are often described as savages, hostile, and heathens. Therefore, the voices and experiences of Native Americans are often not included as significant persons in shaping the history of this country. On the other hand, the violence and dehumanizing ways in which the white settlers destroyed Native Americans is excluded. What remains are the words and voices of whites who tell the stories from their particular vantage point.

The lack of the written word is not the acknowledgement of the oral tradition, but the inability or lack of attention given to putting history into a written form. Although the oral tradition is very significant, in a society where the written word has become the means by which actions become translated into what deeds should or should not be done, the spoken word loses much of its power.

Reality and authority have become fixed by the written word. As more persons learn to read and write, the power of the printed word takes on greater meaning and authority. Consequently, how an event becomes remembered throughout time is very much determined by what has been written about it. For instance, during slavery, many of the newspapers stopped printing stories of slave uprisings because they did not want to alarm the slaveholders or to encourage the slaves to revolt. Although people may have heard about the slave revolts, seeing those accounts in print was believed to cause fear of the slaves among the whites. As Raboteau notes throughout his book Slave Religion, it was against the law for slaves to learn how to read or write.⁴⁰ If the slaves learned these skills, the slaveholders understood that the slaves would gain a sense of freedom. This sense of freedom and knowledge would help slaves to escape and plan other forms of revolts against slavery.

Finally, how persons in authority decide to retell and print history is another aspect of how history can be oppressive. The power of the pen can never be underestimated. Persons who have the authority to retell and create on paper a particular event can create a scenario that highlights or omits information, can gloss over names, and can describe very subjectively how something happened. The authority to tell what is the historical significance (if any) of a particular event allows the teller to misinterpret and give biased accounts about who and what should be

⁴⁰ Albert J. Raboteau, Slave Religion (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 161.

a part of the story. For example, the history textbooks in this country are usually written by persons of Euro-American descent. Consequently, many of these textbooks highlight the contributions and the genius of European and white Americans at the expense of other racial and ethnic groups in the United States. An example is cited in the classroom history books which note that the slaves were happy being slaves. The civil rights movement and the black power movement helped change this written portrayal of African American slaves as happy.

The oppressive or limiting characteristics of history--exclusion, lack of written history, and who has the authority to tell the history--are also evidenced in black history. For example, black history has not always included the many contributions of African American women. Women have often been neglected or relegated to a lesser role. The history of various movements often describes only the men of that particular time. Some women are highlighted, but the significance of their struggles is not always given the same weight. The words of Frederick Douglass and David Walker are often written about, but the words of Maria Stewart is usually not part of a history lesson. (In 1832, Maria Stewart--an African American woman--became the first American born woman to deliver a public speech. She addressed issues concerning "civil rights and women's rights."⁴¹) Learning about the experiences of many African Americans--both men and women--will

⁴¹ Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 50.

enrich black history because the thoughts and actions of different persons can be part of the dialogue.

Critical reflection upon black history is important in helping to better understand the complexities of black history. Freire's use of problem-posing could be a helpful tool to use in better understanding black history. Although Freire does not address the use of history in most of his work, his use of critical reflection through problem-posing can be helpful here. Problem-posing encourages persons to ask questions and dialogue about issues which push beyond a surface level of understanding. The myths or omitted information concerning facts, dates, people and other concerns about black history can be examined through dialogue using a problem-posing method. This would help to challenge persons to critique black history. For instance, when the names of famous African Americans and their achievements are listed, questions can be raised concerning the reasons for a particular act, who really benefitted from this action, and the impact of the action on the broader community and the African American community in particular.

Malcolm X provides insight on how to look at these dynamics when he addresses the issue of how we select heroes. In a speech he gave on selecting heroes, he discusses why and how he thinks African Americans need to look at who becomes known as the hero. He challenges the audience to think and question who the heroes have fought and for what. A person in the audience raises the idea about Crispus Attucks being a hero. Malcolm X questions whether Attucks, who died for America, would have "laid down his life to

stop the white man in America from enslaving Black people?"⁴²

Malcolm believes that black history often teaches African Americans about persons who have given their lives for a cause, but the reasons for their deaths and the benefit from the actions of these freedom fighters need to be challenged as well as their qualifications for being considered heroes. He writes:

Black people ought to be taught...[about] Black heroes who have died fighting for the benefit of Black people. It was the slave revolt in Haiti when slaves, Black slaves, had the soldiers of Napoleon tied down and forced him to sell one-half of the American continent to the Americans. They don't teach us that. This is the kind of history we want to learn.⁴³

Malcolm X addresses the issue of exclusion when he discusses Negro History Week. Since Malcolm X's assassination Negro History Week has come to be known as Black History Month. The stinging criticism made by of Malcolm over twenty-five years ago still rings true today. Malcolm X criticized the use of Negro history as only "providing history about Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama..." but "without taking us back across the water, back home [Africa]."⁴⁴

A strength within the African American tradition has been the use of the oral tradition. Yet, the changing times have emphasized the written word as a powerful means for conveying historical reality. The African American community for a long period of time

⁴² Malcolm X, By Any Means Necessary (New York: Avon Books, 1964), 124-25.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Betty Shabazz and Pathfinder Press, Malcolm X on Afro-American History (1967; reprint, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1990), 22-23.

was limited to the oral tradition, because the laws forbidding them to read and write denied them access to publishing written work. A few exceptions emerged, such as Walker's Appeals and Frederick Douglass' work, but the masses of African Americans did not have the opportunity to learn how to read and write. As more African Americans learned to read and write, an increase in the written word became a part of their lives.

The need to record events and other important information in written form has become an ever increasing reality. History within the African American community is lost as persons die and significant stories die with them. As Gloria Johnson, a Ph.D. student at the School of Theology has stated: "The oral tradition was good during the days of slavery and necessary, but we need to put things in writing."⁴⁵ She emphasizes the significance of writing when she notes that, "We lose a little bit of history every time someone dies, and their story or life experiences have not been written down; then a little bit of history also dies with them."⁴⁶ The lack of a written history is evidenced in the church. Many churches have long and rich histories, but not much is written down. Elders in the church serve as the oral historians. Unfortunately, their knowledge is buried with them when they die. Oral tradition is good, but the oral and written tradition help to support one another.

How persons in authority, including the storyteller and the

⁴⁵ Gloria Johnson, interview with author, 7 March 1992.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

editor, decide what will be written in a story has tremendous repercussions. Exclusion, as discussed earlier, is part of having the power to decide what should or should not be included in black history. The authority to decide who and what can be included as significant history within black history will constantly need to be challenged and critiqued by African Americans. As Paulo Freire, Malcolm X, Nannie H. Burroughs, Alice Walker, Jacquelyn Grant, and others have directly or indirectly stated in their work, the story of how to liberate a people cannot be told by the oppressor.

The third issue in discussing the limiting or oppressive characteristics of history is the authority or power to tell the story. As Malcolm X noted earlier, when the causes of particular events and the true beneficiaries of these events are glossed over or intentionally omitted, these accounts will only benefit those who have the power to write them. Rewriting the history of a race of people so that it helps to encourage their self-hatred is very destructive and dehumanizing. Malcolm X provides a very insightful commentary on this in his description of "Africa and Self-Hate" in the book entitled Malcolm X on Afro-American History.

They always project Africa in a negative light: jungle savages, cannibals, nothing civilized....We didn't want anybody telling us anything about Africa, much less calling us Africans. In hating Africa and in hating Africans, we ended hating ourselves, without even realizing it.⁴⁷

On the one hand, while black history is informative, it is oppressive because the whole story of Africans and African

⁴⁷ Shabazz and Pathfinder, 85.

Americans has been shrouded in negativity. This is beginning to change, but the reluctance of persons to identify positively with Africa is very much a part of the African American culture.

In critiquing black history, how African Americans retell their own story needs to be critically examined as well. The authority of the storytellers to raise up the hard work of African American men and not to look equally critically at the hard work of African American women must be an issue in the critical dialogue about black history. The examination should not pit the work of men and women against each other, but how the two can work together for the greater good needs to be part of the agenda. Without care, the work of men and women can be used to hurt one another and divide the race. This is reflected in the historical accounts of the civil rights movements. One example, as previously mentioned, is the lack of attention that was given to the impact that women had on helping to shape the civil rights movement. Women such as Ella Baker, Etta Horn, and Beulah Saunders are not given as much attention or praise as the men, who many of us know from the numerous pieces written about them.

Three weaknesses of black theology are (1) negative overreaction to white racism, (2) lack of social analysis, and (3) lack of economic analysis. A brief discussion of each of these areas will be presented. These three issues are topics which are being addressed within black theology. As more African American women and other persons with different life experiences study black theology, new ways of understanding black theology are becoming

part of the dialogue.

One of the weaknesses of black theology is that it was initially very much concerned with and responsive to white racism. "At various stages of the involvement of black theology, it has risen out of a reactive position against the ideological commitments of the oppressor."⁴⁸ Black theology, Cone notes, was so steeped in anger toward whites that it failed to see the beauty and wisdom within our own culture and history. Cone also discusses how it was necessary and appropriate to have this reaction to white racism.⁴⁹ Yet, he also sees how important and necessary it is to have "one's theological vision derived from something more than merely a reaction to one's enemy."⁵⁰ This reactive position of black theology limits the creative power of persons to develop and set the agenda for what issues are important and need to be addressed.

Wilmore was among the first, among contemporary theologians, to insist that our African heritage and the African American culture should serve as part of the base for black theology. Drawing upon and building on what we have to offer as a people helps to strengthen the community. This, in turn, helps us to fight and dismantle racism because we are able to believe in our goodness and the value of ourselves as God's people.

The lack of social analysis is an issue which is addressed by

⁴⁸ Johnson, interview.

⁴⁹ Cone, For My People, 87.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

black theologians as a weakness of black theology. Fighting and struggling to make social changes require that persons be aware of the social problems and the connections between these issues and economics. Unfortunately, black theology initially fell victim to proclaiming that the only problem is racism, but it failed to discuss critically how racism is connected to capitalism and imperialism, as well as theology and the church. Cone reflects on how black theology failed to call into question how capitalism and imperialism are deeply related and intertwined, but relied on moral suasion to change things. The combination of leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Nannie H. Burroughs, and Malcolm X are needed to challenge deeply rooted social and economic problems. A moral appeal will not work with persons who give lip service to justice for all, but whose actions constantly remind us that justice means just-us who are in power.

Black theology cannot afford to only discuss the moral side of how things are to change. It must take a hard and critical look at an issue that Kelly Miller discussed many years ago. He said that African Americans "Buy what we want and beg for what we need."⁵¹ Black theology must question African Americans into about their participation in this American nightmare in which we live. At the same time, it must continue to challenge the oppressive structures created by whites, address imported racism, counter self-hate among African Americans, and provide guidance and direction for dealing

⁵¹ Kelly Miller, Famous Black Quotations, by Janet Cheatam Bell (Chicago: Sabayt Publications, 1986), 11.

with these problems. For instance, black theology (as previously discussed) did not deal with issues of sexism. Problems related to sexism impact the very social structure of the society outside and within the community. Therefore, black theology cannot look in the opposite direction and pretend sexism is not an issue if it claims to be a theology of liberation from oppressive structures.

Black theology must address these issues with people sitting in the pews, preachers, educators, theologians, and people standing on the street corner. Sometimes, of academics forget that people outside of the ivory tower make it possible for black theologians to be in the ivory towers.

Black theology has not adequately addressed the economic dynamics within this country as related to racism and other social oppression. Cone writes that a social and economic analysis needs to be further explored which looks at the social and economic forces. Using a Marxist perspective to analyzing this situation would be helpful. Examining the social problems and economic problems from a Marxist critique was not a consideration for black liberation theologians.⁵² Cornel West critiques black theology's "failure to talk specifically about the way in which the existing system of production and the social structure relate to black oppression and exploitation."⁵³ Without analyzing and understanding a social model for a particular society and culture,

⁵² Cornel West, Prophesy Deliverance! (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 175.

⁵³ Ibid., 111.

West believes it will be impossible to promote "the emergence of any substantive political program or social vision."⁵⁴

Cone writes that most African Americans "believe that outside of the racist practices of social, economic, and political institutions, the United States has the best political system."⁵⁵ West notes that black theology is accurate in denouncing the racist practices in America, but questions how black theologians look at the various issues related to economics. He notes that black theologians should "understand the internal dynamics of liberal capitalist America, how it functions, why it operates the way it does, who possesses substantive power, and where it is headed."⁵⁶ Utilizing the framework which West sets forth will help black theology develop a stronger analysis of other important issues related to liberation of African Americans.

As black theology continues to be challenged by new voices and as more critical analysis is written and heard, the greater will be the depth black theology will have. Previously discussed issues such as sexism and the needs of African American youth are important areas that need continual attention and analysis. Critical reflection upon the economic and social problems can help to focus the work of black theology and the boundaries of the discipline. The need for black theology to deal with concerns beyond, but related to, racism can provide black theologians into

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Cone, For My People, 176.

⁵⁶ West, 113.

an insightful analysis that can be shared with others outside of the academic walls.

Liberation theology in general, and black theology in particular, is constantly being challenged to look at the social and economic dynamics within its particular context. The need for black theology to perform a better critical analysis of the economic issues which surround life in the United States and to understand connections that these issues have to the world.

Black theology and liberation theologies can benefit from the work of persons such as Harold Wilke, Earl Hairston, Linwood Smith, and Sheryl Guest-Emery, who address issues related to deafness and the interactions or lack of interaction between the deaf and hearing communities. The problems which must be confronted include: What does freedom mean when a child is born deaf in a world or society that is designed for hearing persons? How can a person become free when the social and economic pressures work against persons outside of the norm, particularly persons considered a minority within a minority--deaf African Americans?

These are only a few questions and concerns that liberation theologians can think about which can help to expand the vision and social reality of how and what it means to a free and healthy human being created in God's image. As Freire and Burroughs both believe, freedom is a God given right and no one has a right to dehumanize others. Liberation theologies offer a way to stimulate this way of thinking and movement in this direction.

The Church's Life as a Resource

Although black history and black theology are two resources for religious education to draw from, the many activities in the church are also good sources. The various activities of the church provide opportunities for the church to put its words into action. From the days of slavery, when the church was known as the invisible church, it was a place where children and adults could actively participate in an educational setting. For some, this educational opportunity included learning how to read and write, and it provided the gathering place for persons to plan and discuss their escapes and insurrections. Eventually, the church, through the Sunday school, was not only the center for spiritual growth and education, it also served as the educational center for teaching persons how to read and write because there were very few schools for black children.

Grant Shockley and Charles Foster's book, Working With Black Youth, includes a historical overview of the development of Christian education for black youth in the church. Foster notes that the Sunday School became the educational vehicle for youth and adults. Foster states:

The Sunday School, initiated by independent black churches and denominations, remained the principal source of formal Christian education among black youth. The energy and funds from white educational missions during this period were usually channeled into developing schools for ex-slaves for rudimentary instruction. Some of these schools eventually became the founding units for

today's black church related-colleges.⁵⁷

The history of the church reflects a tradition of education (spiritual and academic) and freedom fighting. The two have been seen as working together to liberate African Americans from the treacherous and deadly jaws of oppression. Although the church often has been viewed as a sustaining and guiding force in the lives of African Americans, it has also come under sharp criticism. This criticism is reflected in how persons perceive and interpret the church's lack of response to various social and economic problems and its spiritual opiate attitude in terms of its theology. Yet, the church remains one of the central focuses in the African American community. The church is continually struggling to address the various problems which plague our communities.

The church life is more than Sunday morning or evening worship. Although the worship service is an important aspect in the life of the church, it is not and should not be the only resource the church has to offer people. Instead, the worship experience is the culmination of what has happened during the week in the church community and the peoples' lives. At the same time, it offers inspiration, guidance, and hope as the new week begins. As a formal expression of the faith, the worship service can provide educational, spiritual, and social interaction.

⁵⁷ Charles R. Foster, "Historical Perspectives," in Working With Black Youth, eds. Charles R. Foster and Grant Shockley (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 11-12.

Through watching and interacting with the nurses, ushers, deacons, pastor and ministers, music, and sermons, children begin to see what is considered important to their faith development as well as what is not considered important. For example, many African American churches have nurses on duty during the service. The nurse is there to assist anyone who may become ill during the service or who may have been so moved by the spirit that he or she needs someone to help calming him or her and to make sure that the individual is able to continue to sit through the service. Some persons have to be taken to the nurse's room to rest and have orange juice or cool water while resting. Through this children learn that a nurse can provide medical and spiritual assistance in the hospital and in the church. Also, the spirit of God is seen as being quite powerful and sometimes scary to younger children when persons scream, shake, dance, and shout so much that the nurse must come to calm them down. I used to think of the nurse as a sign of relief because she would help to calm the people down, and I would feel better.

One of the more prominent roles in the church is the ushering. The uniformity and the precision with which the ushers perform their duties are very crucial to the flow of the service. Youth and adult ushers practice how to walk, where to stand, how to stand, and when to dim the lights. These are just a few of the various details that ushers must learn and attend to during the service. At most churches, ushers dress in a very uniform fashion, from gloves to a dress or sports jacket. More often than not, the

scriptural reference for ushers is, "I would rather be a door keeper in the house of the Lord than to dwell in the tents of iniquity" (Ps. 84:10). The ushers are the door keepers to God's house and this role is important because the ushers serve as guides for the movement of the service. Serving others is a way of serving God.

The life of the church is very much affected and influenced by the culture. Like other systems of beliefs and religious faiths, the Christian faith is informed by the culture which helps to shape how we understand our faith. Our culture shapes our worldview, beliefs, and relationships--defining the parameters of our faith. In the African American community, the cultural context is different from the dominant culture's understanding of what should and should not be accepted as part of the cultural experience in the United States. In Ella Mitchell's article, "Black Nurture," she states:

The fact that the black experience is still so different from America's majority experience has finally helped many to see why a different "culture kit" for coping is so natural, even mandatory. Now since learning is always done in a cultural context, it should be easy to see why without conscious intent to vary from dominant patterns, my grandparents parents taught them differently.⁵⁸

Since learning is culturally bound, the church is also very much connected and constructed around various cultural specifics. The life of the church provides another avenue by which persons can learn how to develop a better understanding of who they are through

⁵⁸ Ella Mitchell, "Black Nurture," in Black Church Lifestyles, comp. Emmanuel L. McCall (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1986), 45.

their understanding of whose they are, as mentioned earlier. A positive and strong message should prevail through the life of the church about the goodness of African American children.

Janice Hale-Benson examines a different approach to how persons develop their cognitive abilities. Benson focuses her attention on the cognitive development of African American children. In her book Black Children, she contends that biology and culture are important factors in a person's development. Benson quotes from various scholars who are critical of Piaget's methods to support her theory. For example, Benson cites an example from T. Ward, a psychologist, who asks, "How much of the variance among people is attributable to culture and how much to maturational factors? The present state of the art does not allow us to make a definitive statement."⁵⁹ Yet, Benson also raises Piaget's own concern for this matter.

The kind of psychology we develop in our social environments remains conjectural as long as comparative, extensive and systematic research is not available; a great effort is still to be made in this direction....Only such studies allow us to separate the effects of biological and mental factors from those of social and cultural influences on the formation and socialization of individuals.⁶⁰

According to Benson, in order to understand the African American child, we must accept and understand the context in which the child is living because this context is very crucial to the development of the child. Therefore the child's culture becomes

⁵⁹ Hale-Benson, 21.

⁶⁰ Hale-Benson, 22.

very important. Asa Hillard, who wrote the preface for Benson's book, supports Benson's belief.

Abundant data shows that culture patterns influence the way information is perceived, organized, processed, and utilized. Consequently, a discussion of the growth, development, and cognition of the African American child must take into account that culture is one of the greatest environment variables.⁶¹

Benson's work emphasizes the need for African American children to receive an education in a cultural enriching environment which challenges them to develop their intellectual abilities and develop their talents and skills. For Benson, this type of educational environment affirms the child's identity, provides ways of learning which reflect the African American culture, and encourages students to strive for the best in all aspects of life. This educational environment would emphasize language/communication skills, mathematical concepts, positive self-concepts, positive attitude toward learning and school, and African American studies. Creating an educational setting which allows children to learn about themselves and others will help children to meet various challenges.

A line from a song that is often sung by a children's choir in a church is, "I am a promise with a capital P." Our children are our present and future promises for a better today and tomorrow. The church must constantly remind itself of this and create ways for children to learn and actively participate in living out their lives in healthy and dynamic ways. In spite of the often sexist

⁶¹ Hillard, foreword to Black Children, xxii.

attitudes of men and women reflected in our culture, the African American church offers opportunities for persons to be affirmed as human beings in the sight of God, regardless of what society tells them. The cultural ethos of the church is one that gives hope to persons who have continually been denied the right to freely exist. Although our community is plagued with problems that have and are destroying us, the church remains our shining ray of hope.

Due to the complex problems which face our community and the oppressed conditions that many people find themselves living in, the church has a heavy burden of problems that it must address. The spiritual and everyday concerns of the people require the church to think creatively about constructing various programs, models, and partnerships to make the necessary changes in our society and in the churches. The voice of the church must not ever be silent while the people suffer in silence and/or lament in loud and painful voices. Spokespersons for the church as well as the people themselves must speak out, write, and contribute through their actions to help to bring the Kingdom of God into reality.

The need to develop positive self-images and self-esteem are recurrent and critical themes within the African American community. We live in a culture that does not fully promote the beauty, genius, and gifts of African American people. So often the athletes or the entertainers are the only people who reflect any glimmer of the genius and talent of our people. Even in these fields, the focus as to what and how you can do things is restricted. In spite of the limitations which have been placed

upon our people (internally and externally), we still keep rising. Yet, there is much work to be done in guiding children to a healthier sense of self, individually and collectively.

To help our children to develop positive images and self-esteem Jawanza Kunjufu, an educational consultant, suggests that first we must understand the difference between self-images and self-esteem. Kunjufu states in his book Developing Positive Self-images and Discipline in Black Children, "Self-esteem is to possess a favorable opinion of oneself, while image is defined as a likeness symbol, mental picture or the reliving of a sensation in the absence of the original stimulus."⁶² He continues his definition by providing a framework for how each of these particular concepts should be understood in relationship to one another. Kunjufu writes, "Self-esteem should be viewed more as an end result, and self-images more as a process or catalyst affecting self-esteem."⁶³

So much talk is given to children being our future and our present and how precious they are. Unfortunately, children suffer the tragedy of economic oppression, racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression in deep and disturbing ways. The church must continually work towards providing food, clothes, and shelter for children. At the same time, it must give them hope through providing them opportunities to learn more about themselves and to

⁶² Kunjufu, Developing Positive Self-Images and Discipline in Black Children, 15.

⁶³ Ibid.

think and feel better about themselves. Through Sunday School, children and youth activities, choir, worship services, trips, and more, the church can be the vehicle which will help children and their parents.

Caring, nurturing, and educating our children is a difficult task, but it is our responsibility to provide the best care and love that we can for all of them. Valuing the educational opportunities, and the way in which we choose to educate our children, will impact and influence how our children will react to the environment and to others. As Kunjufu notes:

Children are extremely sensitive to the messages that are given by the people around them. They start by learning and sensing how people feel and by the silence that they receive. Children can feel rejection and negative racial attitudes that affect their self-concept. A child's self-concept is learned. He senses, feels, and assigns meaning to external stimuli in his life.⁶⁴

Consequently, children need to be in an environment that encourages and stimulates them to think and feel in ways that are healthy to their overall development. If there are negative forces and stimuli operating in several areas of their lives, how can we provide a better way for children to learn how to deal with the various forces influencing their decisions? What can the church do to facilitate a healthier place for children to live and enjoy their lives?

These are not easy questions, but the church must continually work towards addressing them for the sake of all humanity. As it has been previously discussed, the need to develop a healthier

⁶⁴ Ibid., 16.

sense of self is an important task for the African American community. Although black theology and black history offer numerous examples of how this can and has been achieved, Christian (religious) education within the church must continually work towards creating and providing opportunities for children and adults to become as healthy, free, and whole as possible. Part of the cultural and spiritual responsibility of the church is assistance in guiding children to develop a healthy sense of self. Helping children to create a positive image of self, and of African American people in general, will enhance and nurture their understanding of who they are and their purpose in life.

Many churches have begun to expand their ministries to give children not only spiritual nurturing but also various tools and skills needed to develop and maintain a healthy growth and maturity. Consequently, the church still remains a very strong and viable force within the African American community. Within the life of the church, there are many opportunities for African American children to learn about the Christian faith and life. First, this discussion begins with the spiritual dimension of the faith for children, which is an important aspect in the life of the church. From learning Bible stories, music and prayers, children begin learning how to think and understand their faith at an early age.

The life of the church can provide a significant number of occasions for children to learn about the faith and how they can actively participate in their own growth and maturity in the faith.

For example, some churches have what is called Children's or Youth Church. A particular area of the church is designated as the worship area for children's or youth from 6 to 11 years. Some churches begin at age 5 and expand the age to 17 years. Some of the churches in Washington, D.C. have such a program. For example, the program at Metropolitan Baptist Church is designed for children from ages 6 to 11 years. During the worship service movies, stories, and other activities are planned for the children to participate in and enjoy. The service is also reflective of the service in the main sanctuary in that the children serve as ushers, deacons, trustees, and worship leader.

Some churches have chosen to expand their educational ministries beyond the traditional morning Sunday School morning time and Bible study. Various churches across the country have invested their energies into designing innovative programs or incorporating existing educational programs (i.e., curriculums or activities which promote African-American cultural values and thoughts; emphasize science, mathematics, and technology; and/or address social issues that children face or need to be aware of. The church is faced with meeting the many different needs of the community in concrete and life giving ways. Therefore, we must take seriously and even more intensely the educational needs that exist in our communities.

The drug problem within the country is devastating. In the African American community, substance abuse (in particular) is at a high rate and is causing chaos and death. In light of the many

problems and violent actions which occur as a result of this abusive behavior, there must be a strong and clear educational message sent to children about the dangers and problems that occur when persons abuse themselves this way. Churches have responded to the awesome challenge of educating persons about substance abuse. There is a variety of treatment programs, educational workshops, seminars, videos, and other resources which churches use to inform their parishioners and the community about substance abuse. Many churches target their information to children, youth, and young adults. They hope that this will serve as a preventive measure for anyone wanting to experiment with different forms of dangerous substances. Other churches have treatment facilities or work with other community-based programs to assist persons in their recovery or post-recovery process. More programs and new insights are needed to help eradicate this problem which terrorizes and destroys our communities.

One such program that is coordinated through the church is CNBC's National Anti-Drug Campaign (NADC). This program serves as a model for churches to work together and bring ideas and actions which can make changes in our churches and communities. NADC, through the churches, "seeks to leverage the influence of the black church and its clergy in mobilizing communities to combat the epidemic of drug abuse and the crime associated with drugs."⁶⁵ Working with various community organizations (e.g., religious

⁶⁵ The Congress of National Black Churches (Washington, D.C.: CNBC, n.d.), n.p.

groups, police, school systems), NADC's goal is to bring these groups into partnership with one another. As partners, they can establish a stronger alliance and devise effective means to addressing the issues associated with substance abuse.

The theme for the National Anti-Drug Campaign is "A Charge To Keep We Have." As a community of faith we are charged to care for one another. Our responsibility to care for those who are destructive to themselves and the community must be a part of this charge. The responsibility of caring for one another also includes the educational component related to substance abuse for black youth and their families. NADC believes that it has the charge of educating "Black youth and their families on (substance abuse) and provides meaningful alternatives to the influences of drugs and the lure of organized crime associated with drugs."⁶⁶ As more children become aware of the painful reality of substance abuse, the church needs to be a beacon of light and a ray of hope that shows them that we can and will overcome this problem. The church must stay involved and not wash its hands of our catastrophic behavior and attitudes.

A leading pastor in Philadelphia, Marshall Shepard, once stated:

In the Black Church we say that we must love God with our heart, our soul, and our mind. We've done pretty well on the heart and soul. Now we've got to start doing better

⁶⁶ Ibid.

on the mind.⁶⁷

The quality of our lives is more than how we feel. It encompasses our thoughts and actions as well. There is a relatedness and interconnectedness among these three dimensions in our lives--feelings, thoughts, and actions. As Rev. Shepard noted, the black church must continually address the needs and issues related to the development of our minds. The theme for the United Negro College Fund is "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." This statement of truth not only applies to a college level education, but also to the educational process within the church. One way of building a stronger community of faith and nurturing a healthier self-image for African American children is to encourage them to develop their minds. The church needs to serve as a role model and a center for intellectual growth.

In keeping with the church's mission to help children develop their minds and bodies as well as their souls, the church is often involved in recreational and educational activities. Many African American churches are going beyond their Sunday morning service activities to help children develop a better sense of who they are and whose they are. Such activities include athletic leagues (e.g., basketball, softball); the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) - Black Church Project (science, mathematics, and technology activities for girls, women,

⁶⁷ Yolanda S. George et al., Church Based Science and Mathematics Education: Black Church Project (Washington, D.C.: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1989), 1.

minorities, and pre-school aged children and up); Congress of National Black Churches (CNBC) Project Spirit (an after-school, Saturday School, parent evaluation program), and the CNBC National Anti-Drug Program (youth component). The AAAS Black Churches Project program and CNBC's Project Spirit are two examples of programs which will be highlighted are part of the educational dimension of the life of the church.

AAAS Black Church Project

The first program, the AAAS Black Church Project, is one in which I participated part of CNBC's Black Pastors Fellowship Program. The Fellowship Program places pastors or seminary students in various organizations across the country. Ministers participating in this program are directed to develop various skills and utilize resources "in order to enhance the effectiveness of their ministries to the church and the community."⁶⁸ Also, the Fellowship Program encourages its participants to "serve as advocates for black churches in their placement organizations, demonstrating the strengths and resources which the church brings to bear upon vital community problems and issues."⁶⁹ This program also provides another resource for the community of faith by helping ministers to learning how to creatively participate in the community beyond the church walls. Ministers in this program gain knowledge and information that can be used to enhance the educational and social-spiritual awareness in the church.

⁶⁸ The Congress of National Black Churches, ii.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

According to the objectives of the AAAS Black Church Project, adults who participate in this project are church staff members and volunteers who will conduct the following activities:

1. Science and Mathematics Workshops - To help parents encourage their children's interest and success in science and mathematics.

2. Science and Mathematics Career Days - To help young people and their parents find out about career opportunities in science-related fields.

3. Public Science Days - To help the general community to visit local science museums and find out more about science and technology issues.⁷⁰

The Black Church Project serves African American churches and community-based organizations which have an interest in sponsoring science, mathematics, and computer activities within their particular communities or which already have these programs. Its mission to serve in the African American community is based upon Dr. Malcom's belief that there are various means within the community to help make a difference in changing negative or destructive influences that are obstacles to young people pursuing constructive careers. (Dr. Malcom is the director of education and resources at the American Association for the Advancement of Science). Therefore, the church is part of the supportive system in the community which can help "young people to pursue successful careers in the science and technologies of the future" by offering

⁷⁰ George et al., 4.

programs in science, math, and computers.⁷¹

In order to bring the Black Church Project to the churches and the community-based programs, workshops are given at various geographical locations in the country. Information and activities are shared during the workshops. For instance, the workshops will include training guides on how to conduct the workshops for each representative's respective site; a workbook entitled "Girl Scouts Science and Mathematics - Linkages for the Future" which provides the science and mathematics activities and instructions on how to guide the students in doing the activities; hands-on activities; materials concerning writing budgets and proposals; and resources related to science and mathematics for children.

The Black Church Project offers to community organizations and churches a model for how to do science, mathematics, and computer activities for children and adults. Helping children to use their minds and the gifts that have been given to them will encourage them to seek more knowledge and to feel confidence in themselves as thinking persons who have something to contribute. As the church continually participates in these types of activities, our children will have more opportunities to learn about various fields of knowledge, as well as the opportunity to learn more about career opportunities beyond their present scope of knowledge.

⁷¹ American Association for the Advancement of Science, Your Guide to the Association for the Advancement of Science - 1990 (Washington, D.C.: AAAS, 1990), 3.

Project SPIRIT

The other program which works with the church to help children enhance their lives in a positive way is also another program of the CNBC - Project SPIRIT. Project SPIRIT is the program which makes up the black family program of CNBC. As an after-school and Saturday school program, Project Spirit is located in various major urban areas and serves children 6 through 12 years of age. This program is designed "to provide black children with a positive self-image and an Afrocentric context for learning, which helps them understand the cultural tradition in which they were born."⁷² Creating a healthy, fun, spiritual, and educational environment for the children to learn about themselves and their history, new insights and knowledge, and their spirituality, provides a stimulating and nurturing place for children to grow in wisdom and knowledge. The project director, Vanella Crawford summarizes the program when she states:

PROJECT SPIRIT has endeavored to inspire in the hearts and minds of all of its participants a cultural, academic, social, and spiritual passion that can only be best realized through the manifold resources indigenous to the black church.⁷³

As we strive to realize the dream of a world where race, class, gender, and color are not the criteria by which persons are negatively judged, such programs as Project Spirit offer us a hope for a better present and future through the educating and life

⁷² Congress of National Black Churches, n.p.

⁷³ Vanella Crawford, "Ethnic Education for Children in the Black Church: Our Duty and Responsibility," Visions, Summer 1991, 8.

giving opportunities we are to give our children and ourselves.

Project SPIRIT is the acronym for:

Strength
Perseverance
Imagination
Responsibility
Integrity
Talent⁷⁴

It will take all of these ingredients to provide our children with the necessary tools needed to cope and live life to the best of their potential and to fulfill their dreams.

Conclusion

Religious education for African American children should not and cannot afford to have such a narrow focus that everyday realities are not discussed or creatively addressed. Poverty, incarceration, teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness, unemployment, and suicide are just a few of the perilous realities which face our communities and our world. We need to be about the business of educating one another through our actions and our words (oral and written).

In conclusion, through our time and investment in the sciences, our history (past and present), manual skills and talents, religion, mathematics, musical expressions, and other aspects of culture, we African Americans learn who we are.

⁷⁴ National Technical Resource and Training Center of the Congress of National Black Churches, Project SPIRIT Site Coordinator's Handbook (Washington, D.C.: CNBC, n.d.), 6.

Additionally, learning about who we are can create an environment as to inspire who we shall be. This is very much affected by how we understand God and how we relate to creation. Consequently, understanding our history and presenting our teaching in such a way that they show our strengths and weaknesses, will set the stage for developing a healthier attitude about ourselves as African Americans. Using the concepts of black theology and everyday life experiences to emphasize the importance of our personhood and the power of God to work continually in our lives and create changes through and for us, will contribute to persons' learning to live as free human beings, not allowing others to oppress them.

Developing religious education resources for African American children requires that the cultural values and experiences of the community be included. The question is not whether black theology or black history have anything to contribute to religious education, but what do they say to help us better understand who we are as African American Christians.

Black theology and history are two of the many resources which are available to help persons develop their faith. Unfortunately, African American people have not learned to love themselves as much as they should, so we do not always see the validity nor the significance of actively seeking to learn our history or to see our faith within the context of our history. Black theology is authentic and liberating. Wilmore so eloquently and fervently states,

from the beginning black theology was Christian theology that had been reinterpreted by black believers in an

effort to understand what the gospel had to do with their struggle to survive genocide, to elevate themselves and their families to a higher quality of life and culture, and to free themselves and all people who needed liberation from every form of domination.⁷⁵

Black theology continues to do this and can serve as a reminder to Christian education of its task in liberation. Both black theology and black history provide windows of opportunity for educators to redirect their focus on what children are to learn. Because of the relationship between the two learning about one serves as a path upon which the minds and imaginations of children can travel toward the other. Through exploring the sciences, mathematics, history, theology, art, and more, children are given the chance to broaden their worldviews and to see that God has created more than enough for them to learn and do.

There are several resources available to help children, youth, and adults learn more about their history, faith, and culture. Helping children to believe in themselves will give them the encouragement to accept who they are and whose they are. In light of the plight of African American people in this country, religious education cannot be limited to "Sunday School" time. Religious education must not be neatly packaged as the Sunday School hour for children or as Bible study time. Christian education includes the whole church. Persons concerned with Christian education in the church should not think of black theology as foreign or irrelevant. The experiences of the people in and outside of the church help to give credence and direction to black theology.

⁷⁵ Wilmore, 47.

Helping children to be healthy and whole is a responsibility of the church. At one time, the church was the only place for African Americans to go for assistance in all aspects of their lives. Various changes have opened up different experiences which have been good and bad for our community; yet, the church remains a viable force in the lives of African Americans. Therefore, the church's religious education programs should stimulate children to use the minds, hearts, and physical gifts God has given them.

CHAPTER 8

Guidelines for Constructing Religious Education

Programs for African American Deaf Children

In this chapter, guidelines are presented for the church to use as it prepares to become more inclusive of persons with disabilities. Although the guidelines can serve to help the church in becoming more inclusive for all persons, the central focus is on deafness. The guidelines include suggestions for developing religious education resources. These guidelines draw on the resources that are presently available from the various faith communities. Activities will be given that can be adapted for people with various communication needs. These activities are designed with the African American deaf community as the target community. The activities are not limited to African American deaf children, though the illustrations and activities were selected to expose the children to more images and ideas within the African American community.

As a faith community, when we have excluded the least of these, and when we have marginalized the least of these, then we have done the same to God. How can we say that we love God, but not be willing to help or learn from others? As too often is the case, the community of faith only mirrors the larger society and its attitudes toward persons with disabilities. For example, deaf persons in the Jewish faith are "excluded from the Judaic studies according to the Jewish law."¹ Paulo Freire reminds the church

¹ Brenner, n.p.

that it is part of a particular time and place; therefore, the church is subject to the same type of discriminations that occur in society. This is particularly true since many of the people who perpetuate discriminatory behavior are church members.

Harold Wilke also addresses this problem when he says that, "Mirroring the secular world, resistance to the presence of handicapped persons is a continuing blot upon the church's attempt at openness and inclusivity."² Although the church often excludes people who are blind, deaf, mentally retarded, or physically disabled, the "least of these" are still a part of God's family. Jesus reminds us of this when he tells the parable about the man who wanted to give a banquet and invite his friends and wealthy people. Yet, they all made excuses about not coming. So the man decided to invite the poor, the blind, and the maimed. Jesus responds to this man's invitation by saying, "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be paid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:13-14). We are reminded that "The Kingdom of God is not complete without the poor and the maimed! And each member thereof is not complete, or has hope of salvation, unless his own lameness or her own blindness, the negative aspects of their lives, are included."³

As the church or any community of faith continually tries to

² Harold Wilke, Creating the Caring Congregation (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 31.

³ Ibid., 29.

meet the needs of the members of its congregations and to help those who ask the community of faith for assistance, whether they are members or not, the people of faith must be willing to respond in a positive way. This positive response is our way of responding to God's call to love our neighbors as illustrated by Jesus in the story of the good Samaritan. There are "persons who are wounded or ill on the road to Jericho whenever we travel. On this road the church is often not the Good Samaritan, but the priest and the Levite passing on the other side."⁴ The good Samaritan did not ask where the man was from, his family origin, if he could walk or talk, or any type of question which would have been time consuming and irrelevant to the man's condition. He (the Samaritan) was willing to provide whatever assistance he could to help this beaten and forgotten man by the side of the road (Luke 10:30-37).

When communities of faith begin to say "Yes" to being inclusive and having a reciprocal process (sharing and receiving by all), with persons with disabilities actively participating in the life of the church, the church must begin to make some changes. Saying "Yes" in response to these needs is a responsibility of the African American church.

Many of the resources which have been developed for children who are deaf are usually designed for non-African American children. The illustrations and the examples that are often used are of white children and adults. Consequently, the religious education materials for deaf African American children should

⁴ Ibid., 31.

include visual examples of deaf African American children and adults, examples of joys and problems concerning African Americans, and stories which discuss spiritual and everyday living experiences of African American people. This would give deaf children stories to which they could relate and understand because these experiences would have some basis in their everyday reality. Living in a society that is sexist, racist, economically exploitive, and biased against persons with disabilities can make life difficult for deaf African Americans.

Although there has been theological and historical discrimination and oppression against persons who are deaf, deaf persons of color are also faced with racism. As stated earlier, the first black school for deaf children was begun in 1869 in North Carolina. Fifty-two years before this, the first school for white deaf children was started in 1817 in West Hartford, Connecticut. Being deaf serves as a connection between African American and non-African American deaf children, but skin color is also a dividing factor.

Within the deaf community there is the separation along racial lines. Like American culture in general, among the deaf, minority racial status connotes a less than equal human being. As Jerome Schein writes, "In racial distinctions, as in other features, the deaf community mirrors American society. Like the rest of society, deaf Americans divide along racial lines socially, economically, and to some extent culturally."⁵ Deaf persons are already

⁵ Schein, At Home Among Strangers, 22.

classified in a separate category, and to compound this with race (and gender issues) creates even another sub-group. Being a "minority" within a "minority" can only add more pressure and oppression to African American deaf persons.

The dual burden of being an African American and deaf in the United States of America is a heavy load to carry. African Americans who are deaf must learn how to cope with the question of identity from at least two viewpoints. First, there is the issue of identity as an African American, and secondly, the issue of being deaf.

Identity has and is a struggle for African Americans in general. W. E. B. DuBois identified how this two-fold perspective which characterizes the struggle for identity. The "two-ness" DuBois refers to is as "an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."⁶ Although DuBois wrote these words awhile ago, they are still true today for African Americans. Yet, in reality, the burden for African American children who are deaf is learning how to cope with the two-ness in a society that discriminates against persons because of both their race and their disability. This is compounded (as Hairston noted in his book) by the lack of educational experience, not enough living skills, and social separation.

African Americans in general suffer from a higher rate of

⁶ W. E. B. DuBois, 215.

unemployment, low pay, inadequate housing, poor health care, and many other problems than the general population. With the black deaf community, these rates are even higher. This is evidenced in the following description of the plight of black deaf persons:

The black deaf carry the dual burden of deafness and blackness and suffer the predictable economic consequences--more unemployment, poorer education, low pay, less security, less skilled work than the white deaf.⁷

At a conference entitled "Empowerment and Black Deaf Persons," at Lehman College in New York, the issues of empowerment, identity, race, and gender for African Americans who are deaf were discussed. One of the workshops during the conference addressed the issue of identity for deaf African Americans. The question of which part of their identity should be mentioned first--African American or deaf--caused quite a lively discussion. African Americans who are deaf, particularly the young people, are in the process of carving out how they want to identify themselves. This struggle for identity is an on-going one that will continue to be debated and discussed.

In light of the struggle that deaf persons in general have had to face and are facing because of people's beliefs about deafness, and the struggle of African Americans in particular, African American children need to learn how to cope in many ways. The community of faith can offer deaf children the opportunity to learn how to cope with some of the difficulties of life through developing hope and strength within themselves and belief in God.

⁷ Ibid.

The Christian community emphasizes the love of God through Jesus Christ for us all, and other communities of faith also express the love that God has for humanity.

Emphasizing God's loving and sustaining power is not strange to the African American church. It was the power of love that the church stressed to the nine African American students who had to endure the painful and extremely stressful experience of integrating Little Rock (Arkansas) High School. Through songs, prayers, sermons, activities for the young and old, community service, politics, economic development, and Sunday School, the African American church has been a constant, steady, and powerful force in the African American community.

At the same time, the black church has not been a leader in developing programs or materials for African American children who are deaf. The available religious materials and resources for deaf children are developed and written by non-African Americans. For example, the Southern Baptist and the Lutheran churches have educational and religious books and other resources which are written about deaf persons and for deaf persons.

African American deaf children need to develop a strong sense of identity within the deaf community and the black community to help them to cope. Just as the black church has served as the guiding post for black people for many years, the church can serve as a designer and producer of materials, programs, and resources for African American deaf children. Also, the black church can develop materials that could be used by deaf children in general.

The use of black theology and black history in designing religious education resources for African American deaf children can add an important to the religious materials. Black theology undergirds Christian education because it emphasizes the theme of liberation through God's liberating power through Christ. The theme of liberation emphasizes the power and love of God for those who are the dispossessed in society. Because of this, black theology shows that God is on the side of those who are not accepted by society. Deaf African American children need to know that they are loved and accepted by God and Christ. There are many barriers that can work against them, so they will need to learn from the church that God does love them. This love is one that will give them the courage to fight against the injustices they will face.

Black theology also serves as a well from which Christian education can draw for deaf children because of the theme of racial pride which it advocates. In this way, deaf children can learn about the various historical events and persons which have helped to create change in society. Also, this would give the children a chance to see how these events and others have opened opportunities for deaf African Americans. Hairston discussed throughout his book how deaf African Americans still had to face segregation and other injustices against African Americans in general. At the same time, when laws have been enacted to desegregate schools and obtain rights for African Americans, the deaf community has also benefitted from these laws. The African American community must

continue to broaden its perspective in caring for the oppressed within its own community.

Guidelines for the Church

Historically, the church has responded, and is still in the act of responding, to the spiritual needs of the deaf community. The following are some guidelines which the church can put into action to create a caring congregation. These guidelines provide helpful suggestions that can be modified to fit a particular church's situation and present some general information concerning a hearing church's active participation in becoming inclusive.

1. Acknowledge Difference. An important guideline is to acknowledge difference. It is not possible to deal with any problems if we are not willing to accept the differences that we have from other persons. If persons pretend there are no differences or use the differences to oppress others, change for a more just society cannot occur. Treating people who are different from what is considered normal, exists in many aspects of societies. Race, physical appearances, mental abilities, and mobile abilities are just a few of the factors that contribute to the prejudices and barriers we create in order to keep others out. Whether it is from fear and/or ignorance, the results are degrading and painful. Nannie H. Burroughs addresses this issue in her work concerning racial prejudice. She discusses how the differences between races need to be acknowledged and accepted. For example, Burroughs stresses that whites need to stop penalizing African Americans for not being white and to realize that color is not

character, but only a distinctive mark of a person.⁸

The same basis for prejudice and discrimination, fear, and ignorance regarding African Americans also the basis for prejudice against hearing impaired persons. Professor and sign interpreter Francisco Roman underscores this when he talks about the barriers people construct concerning deaf people. He says that "The basis for all types of prejudice, fear and ignorance, are the same."⁹ There are similarities, but there are also differences between non-hearing and hearing persons. The church, as stated before, is a very word-oriented community. Some traditions may emphasize more rituals or ceremonies, but by and large, the church is an institution where the Word of God usually is emphasized through some type of oral communication. If you are a hearing person, this type of community is much easier to communicate and learn in. If you are not hearing, the words have no real meaning to them if you have not been given the opportunity to connect these words with some type of meaning.

2. Look to Persons with Disabilities as Role Models. The second guideline is to look to persons with disabilities as role models. Many hearing communities will have services in sign language or special events for the persons with disabilities, but the leadership is usually someone who can hear, see, walk, and talk without great difficulty. Deaf persons and other persons with

⁸ Burroughs, Twelve Things the Negro Must Do, 24.

⁹ Francisco Roman, "Orientation to Deafness," class notes, Prince George's Community College, Largo, Md., 20 January, 1992.

disabilities should have opportunities to serve in roles of leadership. These leadership roles can include worship leader, educational superintendent, usher board, nurse, choir director, and chairperson of various groups and activities within the church and the community.

Persons who are deaf, blind, or in wheelchairs need to know and be exposed to persons who have disabilities but still serve in leadership capacities. For example, deaf persons do not always need to see a hearing person as the signer for the worship service, choir, or preacher. Deaf people can sign the service, sign/sing in the choir, or preach. There are deaf persons who are ministers and active in the church. Persons who are in wheelchairs or walk with crutches can serve as worship leader, preach, or chair a major event at the church, such as the Pastor's Anniversary or the Church Anniversary. Seeing, listening, and working with people who are different from us can help each of us to learn from one another and better understand our own limitations and strengths, as well as those of other people.

Deaf role models for deaf children can include other children, youth, and adults. These persons could work together and serve as key persons who could test and plan programs and resources which will benefit the needs of the deaf parishioners. The deaf youth could serve as the assistants in the classrooms and other activities to help the younger children see that they can also participate in leadership roles as they grow older. It is important that the child see persons like herself who are actively

participating in doing God's work. Because the deaf children and deaf youth and adults will have some similar experiences, the interaction between the three groups will foster a sense of community and togetherness that is a part of the hearing church community, but which also has its own identity and distinctions. Again, the need to recognize similarities and difference is important even within the racial group.

3. Create a Context for Fellowship. This guideline directs the church to create a context for fellowship. This is one of the marks of a caring congregation developed by Harold Wilke. Wilke discusses how important it is to provide a setting within the church worship which is open to persons with disabilities. For example, in addition to having sign language as part of the service and other programs within the community of faith, "A trinity of features marks the community of faith...kergyma, the faith; koinonia, the fellowship; diakonia, service."¹⁰ Unfortunately, the community of faith responds to the needs of persons who need assistance, but does not ask them to share in developing new programs or solutions. Wilke believes that when we make a division based on who is "serviced" by the church and who serves, we function as if this should be a separate part of the church's actions. Wilke believes that addressing the needs of persons with disabilities is often designated in the church as an area of diakonia (service). Wilke notes "that persons with handicaps and impairments are seen as recipients of service rather than as

¹⁰ Wilke, Creating the Caring Congregation, 57.

participants in the mission."¹¹

Understanding not only how diakonia (service) relates to person with disabilities but also how kergyma (faith) and koinonia (fellowship) relate to persons with disabilities provides a theological foundation for what is the responsibility of the community of faith. Within the faith, the need to care for the despised, disinherited, and the oppressed are part of the responsibility of us all. At the same time, we are reminded that it is in weakness that we find strength. This theme is prevalent within the faith. In the New Testament, the theme of "strength in weakness, and Jesus in his allusions to the Prophets, particularly Isaiah, and his statements of his own mission, sets the weakness of humankind at its very center, responding to God's grace to find our strength."¹² It is in our human limitations that we can find the inner strength of the God that is within us--the imago dei.

Fellowship in the church, the koinonia, is for all persons to express and share together. "It includes all who receive God's gracious love. It is the Body of Christ, people living together in expression within the corporate body of the church."¹³ Being together as a family within the church through the worship experience, choir, dinners, programs, and special days is important to bringing all persons in the congregation to a more holistic, warm, and loving community of faith.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 58.

4. Hear God's Word. Organizing the church to meet the needs of the persons in the congregation can be an arduous task, yet, the church is called to attempt to respond to making the gospel available for all persons to hear. The power in hearing God's Word has no meaning for a person who cannot hear unless the Word is interpreted in such a way that hearing and non-hearing persons can understand the Word. Hearing needs to be understood broadly to include all forms of receiving and responding. Unfortunately, most hearing preachers, educators, and church leaders carry out their particular duties without thinking about persons who are deaf. If hearing persons have a hard time connecting the spoken Word about God with their lives, then what about persons who cannot hear?

Paulo Freire's emphasis on dialogue is meaningful in this discussion. Freire discusses how dialogue, the power to name, involves reflection and action. Hence, deaf persons should have the opportunity to participate in determining how the various forms of communication and activities will take place in the church. If their thoughts are not heard, then their silence or not being acknowledged does not allow the church to expand its family. At the same time, being included in decision making offers persons a chance to become more human because they are accepted for who they are. For example, the African American church stresses how the church is the place for African American people to feel respected in spite of what society says. This meant that opportunities are available to learn how to express your feelings and thoughts and actively participate in the church. These experiences can also be

used in other aspects of life.

The church must not only invite deaf persons to participate in worship and other activities. The church also has the responsibility to ask for and provide leadership opportunities. If this does not happen, then there is silence from deaf persons. When deaf persons are left out of the decision-making roles, this creates a dehumanizing condition. Paulo Freire advocates humanization because becoming human is what God wants for us, not dehumanization. Deaf persons should advocate that their voices and ways of communicating be heard and seen. Freire does not believe silence is the way humanity should respond to loud dehumanizing conditions. Silence cannot change the world. The spoken true word, (action and reflection) has power for all according to Freire. Therefore, communicating God's Word to hearing and deaf persons needs to be based in relationship between the two. The hearing people cannot speak for the deaf people, and the deaf people cannot speak for the hearing people. Deaf and hearing persons must work together to dialogue and bring about change.

Congregations which have deaf persons should be willing to use sign language and other forms of communications. The pastor, laypersons (children and adults), and other church leaders should have opportunities to learn sign language and/or other methods of communication. Deaf persons should be given several opportunities to participate in the life of the church. Hearing God's Word also comes from being involved in doing God's Word. For instance, deaf

person should have the opportunity to teach Sunday School and Bible classes. Team teaching between a deaf person and a hearing person might be good way to open up dialogue between deaf and hearing persons.

Being involved in the life of the church also means having access to the various services. Many churches have a prayer line service. Persons can call in and leave a prayer request on a recording. If the person is deaf this is not possible. This could be made possible by churches having a TTY (telecommunications) service in which the deaf person can type in their prayer request. Also, there are TTY machines that can print out messages that are typed in. Some businesses have these machines for deaf employees to call in and leave a message. If churches that have TTYs had a service like this, this would give the deaf members a chance to share in the prayer line without having to share their concerns with a third party.

Communicating through touch and song are two important ways for deaf persons to share and learn about God's Word. Since touch is an important way for deaf persons to learn, designing the banners for the church could be done by deaf persons and hearing persons. This allows an opportunity for deaf and hearing persons to work together and learn from one another. Opportunities in the service and other areas of the church should be given as much as possible to relate the spoken word to something concrete and for the signed word to be connected to a spoken word or action. For example, the deaf and hearing children can sing song such as "Kum

Ba Yah." This song can be easily adapted to various forms of signing. The choir can even make its own signs and include clapping, feet stomping, and other forms of expressions.

Through different modes of communicating the Word, we learn and reflect upon its meaning and our response. Whether it is through song, prayer, preaching, or teaching, the church offers many opportunities for hearing God's Word. Therefore, how can anyone hear God's Word if the Word has never been spoken to us in a language we can understand?

5. Provide Materials and Resources. In addition to including sign language and interpreters as part of the overall program of the church, there should be many resources which are written or displayed for deaf persons. Bibles written for the deaf should be provided. As Schein states, "The special edition of the New Testament provides the Scriptures in simplified English that avoids idioms, unusual words, and odd sentence structures that its translators think might confuse Deaf readers."¹⁴ An example of this approach to 2 Cor. 6:11-13, is illustrated below by comparing the King James Version (first scripture) and the deaf version (second scripture).

O ye Corinthian, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels. Now for a recompense in the same, (I speak as unto my children) be ye also enlarged.

We have spoken freely to you people in Corinth. We have opened our hearts to you. Our feelings of love for you have not stopped. It is you that has stopped your

¹⁴ Schein, At Home Among Strangers, 57.

feelings of love for us. I speak to you like you are my children. Do the same as we have done-open your hearts also.¹⁵

Also, visual displays can be used in conjunction with any written materials in order to emphasize or draw attention to something. Special events (e.g., Christmas, Easter, Valentine's Day) should have games and activities which are for hearing and non-hearing persons. The activities for the children should be planned around the different abilities of the children so no one will feel left out.

In some churches, children's church or children's time is a vital part of the community. Interpreters, movies, stories, and other resources should be responsive to the abilities of deaf children. Opportunities to touch objects which are being discussed will be helpful to the child's learning. Stories which talk about children with various types of disabilities should be included within the lessons. Teachers and children who have disabilities should be invited to volunteer and work with the children.

When planning and selecting materials for all church and community activities, include persons with disabilities. For example, deaf people can be a part of planning the Easter program for the Sunday School department. Deaf persons or anyone else with a disability are not to be added as extra persons or special interest groups, but should be included in the beginning planning stages of activities.

These are some guidelines which the church can use to help

¹⁵ Ibid., 56.

make deaf persons and other persons with disabilities feel more comfortable and welcome in the church. The church should not be an exclusive club where only people who look, talk, walk, and act alike can gather to worship, study, and praise God. We profess that Jesus Christ died for all, but we often crucify or ostracize anyone who we feel is not fit for the Kingdom. Jesus paid the price for us all and we are all welcome to the feast at the banquet table. Unfortunately, some of us are greedy and selfish, and we eat as much as we can and do not want to share.

6. Ground Everything in Love. The Apostle Paul once said, "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (1 Cor. 13:13). Love is a necessary and vital guideline. A strong foundation for beginning and sustaining the church's educational program needs to be grounded in love. If we are not able to express love with others who are different from us, we are not living out the gospel message. It is easier to love people who are like us than someone who is not.

Within the Jewish community, Stephen Brenner, president of the Washington (D.C.) Society of Jewish Deaf, gave a speech at the conference on Rabbinic Outreach to Individuals with Special Needs and to Their Families. In his speech to the hearing Jewish community, he emphasized that the Jewish faith has not been open to deaf persons and that charity is missing. He states that the first deaf President of Gallaudet, I. King Jordan said, "Deaf people can do anything but hear. However something else is missing. What happened to the key word of Charity? Yes, C-H-A-R-I-T-Y. That is

right - CHARITY."¹⁶ Brenner is stressing the fact that the Jewish deaf and Jewish hearing persons are not able to work together because most hearing Jewish persons are not willing to open themselves up to including those who are different from them. Because of this, some of the deaf Jewish persons attend Christian services and receive assistance from Christian churches. Expressing love is a must if persons are to feel that people really care about each other and are not merely doing them a favor or fulfilling their service duty.

The overarching and major principle of the Bible and the Christian faith is love. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son..." (John 3:16). It is because of love that God sent Jesus to save humanity. Throughout the Bible, especially in the New Testament, the power of love is the sustaining and motivating power that can overcome the most difficult situations. We love God because God first loved, as articulated in 1 John 4:16: "We love him, because he first loved us." Our response to God is because of this love. The strong Christian roots of Freire and Burroughs lay the foundation for how they understand love to be the necessary ingredient for their educational methods. Freire and Burroughs respond to God's love in creating educational methods which will help people to become the best they can be. It is the love that God has for each of us and that we have for God that is the justification for us for loving our brothers and sisters.

As the church works to become the guiding light, and not

¹⁶ Brenner, n.p..

merely a reflective image of society, persons with disabilities, then we have hope that the church and society will one day learn to accept the differences between people as well as their similarities. Accepting these differences is part of accepting the fact people are different and welcoming all of God's children.

Guidelines for Religious Education

Materials and Resources

If churches are planning to have materials for children who are deaf, the communication ability of the child, as well age and cultural experiences, needs to be considered when selecting materials and resources which are fun and educational. If possible, much information about the child's background should be obtained. The following are some helpful guidelines which may be used in selecting and creating materials and resources for deaf children.

Many of the communities of faith have developed religious education for deaf children that can be adapted for use by a particular denomination or community of faith. Churches which are thinking about or who already have existing programs for deaf children, may want to consult books, video-tapes, workbooks, games, and other resources which have been designed for parents and educators. These materials can also be adapted to work within the various communities of faith. In Rockville, Maryland, the Special Needs Department of the Board of Jewish Education of Greater Washington, has several activities, lessons, books, and other materials for Jewish deaf children. These materials can be

adjusted for deaf children from other faith systems. Also, these activities can be used to teach children who are deaf and hearing about Judaism.

The following guidelines are presented for those hearing congregations who want to become more inclusive in their ministries. The church often says, "NO!" to healing the wounds it has helped to inflict upon others, as well as those society has inflicted. Wilke reflects on this attitude in the following statement from his book Creating A Caring Congregation:

Even as there are ways beyond counting in which the church through its institutional life and its faith has helped individuals survive the terrors of loneliness and alienation, so also the church fails to fulfill such needs.¹⁷

Hearing communities of faith need to be open to inviting hearing and non-hearing persons to join in the service. As the church and other communities of faith are (hopefully) learning to invite all persons to God's banquet table, we need to work on how we prepare the food and set the table.

1. Developing Communication Skills. Respect for the child's way of communicating is important for helping a child believe that he or she will be listened to. Whether the child uses sign language, oral communication, or both, the persons teaching or working with that child should have a working knowledge of the language. Children as well as adults who speak another language usually appreciate it when others make an attempt to learn their language. This country has inculcated people with the idea that a

¹⁷ Wilke, Creating the Caring Congregation, 31.

mono-language skill is enough, and others must learn to think and communicate verbally and in writing in the official language of the United States. Living in a society that emphasizes language skills in this manner makes communication for those who do not or cannot communicate this way a trying, and sometimes painful, experience.

Courses or workshops can be taken at local colleges, universities, churches, and community groups which offer sign language and other forms of communication for the deaf. Hearing persons taking these courses will not only benefit from learning another language but also will begin to see the culture of the deaf community. This will be helpful in learning more about others as well as themselves. Understanding and interacting with others who have different experiences can provide a new window to look through and see the world a little differently, and hopefully, a little better.

The work of Paulo Freire and Nannie H. Burroughs provides support for developing a variety of educational and practical skills for hearing persons and deaf children to enhance their communication skills. Freire's emphasis is on literacy education for hearing persons, but his approach to helping adults learn how to read can be applied to deaf children. Whether children are hearing or hearing impaired, learning how to communicate effectively is part of the development process. Because limited communication ability is debilitating, as mentioned previously, learning how to communicate is very important. More educational and occupational opportunities will be available to the children if

they are able to develop their communication skills beyond a third or fourth grade level. The classroom is often the setting for children to learn and develop communication skills. Using an aspect of Paulo Freire's approach can help deaf children to develop their communication skills. Freire's approach to literacy education is designed to not only helping persons to learn how to read, but he also wants to help participants develop their self-confidence. This provides the participants with the internal drive to believe that they can learn how to read. In learning how to read, they are able to communicate and challenge various societal problems.

Hearing impaired children need to have their confidence strengthened so that they will know that not being able to hear should not be a barrier to becoming the best that they can be. Freire encourages the students to believe in themselves and to look at reality. For deaf children this can begin by having them discuss in the classroom what are the differences between hearing impaired and hearing persons. One approach could be to have the children list and talk about differences they see and know about. For example, the teacher can ask the children to role play how a hearing child and a deaf child answer the telephone. The differences and similarities can be discussed. The teacher should emphasize that the differences are not negative, but just another way of communicating. A telephone and a TTY could be brought into the classroom. This role play could include having the children design their own television shows, role play various occupations,

and invent products for deaf persons to announce during the commercial air time.

Developing communication skills also involves various experiences which will create opportunities for children to take their thoughts to a deeper level. With deaf children, it is important to go beyond what they see. Because they cannot hear, they need to be encouraged to discover things which are obvious to a hearing child. For example, a hearing child knows the sound of an airplane because she or he can hear the sound. The deaf child learns the sound of an airplane through the vibrations that the airplane makes. Taking the children to the airport to learn about airplanes and to feel the sounds of the jets taking off and landing could be a fun learning experience. As students begin to see that they can be inventors for deaf and/or hearing persons, have traditional job opportunities, and share their gifts and talents with others, the more confidence they will have. This confidence will encourage them to want to develop their communication skills and feel comfortable in expressing themselves.

Burroughs' practical skills development can be applied to developing communication skills among deaf children. Her emphasis on persons learning how to develop their present skills and going beyond the limitations of society is applicable to the deaf community. Therefore, when Burroughs emphasized that African American girls and women should develop domestic engineering skills, she meant more than learning basic cooking and cleaning skills. She meant for them to learn the disciplines of science and

art, so students took courses in these areas. In doing this, the students learned how to communicate about cooking in more than one way. Not only did they learn how to cook, but they also learned how to better prepare and store their foods. This would help save money and preserve the food longer. As Burroughs provided new ways for the students to develop their skills, deaf children should be given different opportunities that will sharpen their communication skills and teach them to use their skills in a variety of ways. For example, teaching children how to cook would help them to learn math and reading and to think about a career as a chef. Not only do the children learn a skill that will be useful for them and others, but they are also given the chance to enhance their self-esteem. As the children learn more about what they can do instead of what they cannot do, their deafness will not be seen as a barrier. Developing their self-esteem and going beyond the barriers are important for African American deaf children. Having as many experiences as possible to renew a sense of health and wholeness is necessary in helping African American children to be the best that they can be.

The after school activities that the church offers to hearing children can be adapted for deaf children. Project SPIRIT and the Black Church Project are two programs, which were discussed earlier, that can be adapted to meet the educational needs of deaf children. These activities would help the deaf children to feel a sense of pride about themselves and learn science and math concepts. As the children form a better sense of who they are and

learn academic skills, this will assist in their journey toward becoming scientists, mathematicians, engineers, and other science and math related disciplines.

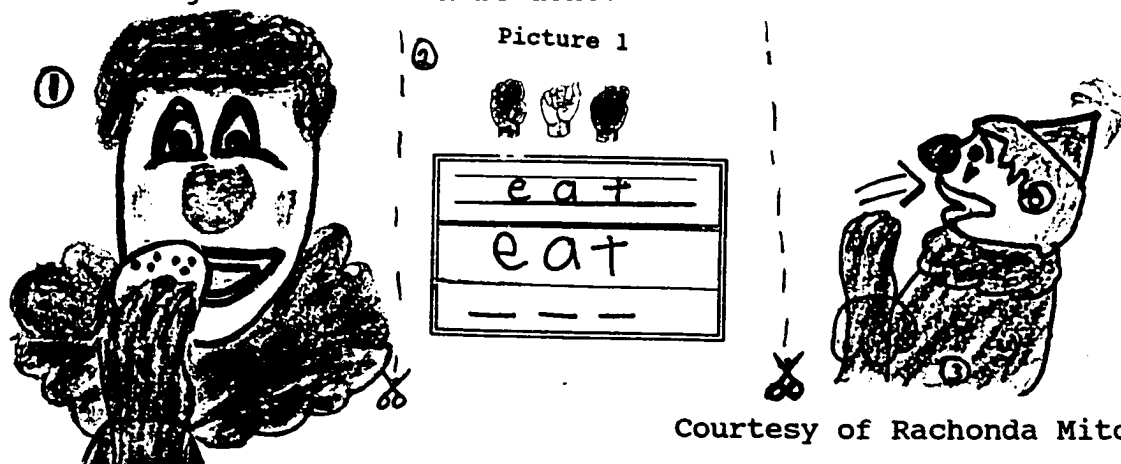
In working with deaf children, more opportunities should be given for them to learn how to communicate and develop their self-esteem. Activities which allow them to participate and not have the teacher doing all the communicating will give them a sense of responsibility in participating in dialogue and other activities. Being able to say their names, whether through voice or sign, gives the children a chance to share with others. Active involvement in a science activity provides an opportunity to explore different avenues of thinking. Asking questions before and during the science activity such as, "What if x is done?" and, "When will y happen?" challenges the children to think about various outcomes of the activity.

The following activities are presented as ways for children to participate in collective activities. Group activities, as in Freire's methods, give the children an opportunity to learn from one another. The activities are presented in a brief overview format and some important aspects of the activities are highlighted. These activities are to designed for children to think positively about themselves and learn more science and math. In the first activity, (which is based on an activity from Project SPIRIT) children are asked to name famous African Americans. These famous people should include persons in their family or their friends. All the names can be listed on the board or written on a

sheet of butcher paper that is tacked up on the wall. The children stand in a circle and each of them will sign their name and the names of one famous person. After signing the names, all the children can sign "We are all Somebody." Also, the class should make up a sign which represents the goodness and greatness of who they are. After making up the class sign, each of the children can sign to the person on their left, "Denise, (the other child's name), you are (class sign name)." (The word sign refers to sign language and does not mean an illustrated poster. Later on the, the class can draw or design a poster to reflect its sign name.)

The next activity involves learning about measurement. Such concepts as approximation, prediction, and comparison can be introduced to the students. The teacher could do an introductory activity by asking the students to approximate (guess) how many M&M's are in a bag. After this brief activity, the students divide into small groups. Each group should be given a small amount of tea leaves (ground), coffee beans (ground), and granulated sugar. The children should then mix the substances together. Then put the mixture in a jar. Cover the jar with thin wire mesh and then cover with a lid. Shake out the substances on a piece of paper. The students can then begin to discuss what came out of the jar? The mixture that is left in the jar can be taken out and ground by the students with a mortar and pestle. Repeat shaking the substance out with mesh. Does any more of the substance come out? As children develop and sharpen their communication skills, through

science and other activities, helping them to recognize and learn new words is important. For example, first, have the children sign the word, then repeat the word back to you, and then write the word. This will help them learn the new word. If possible, have a picture for the children to see which will illustrate what the word is. For example, as the children are learning new words, the following exercises can be done.



Courtesy of Rachonda Mitchell

- a. Have the child color the picture in section 1. (Section 1 gives pictures of the words the child are learning.)
- b. While coloring the pictures, have the child make the sign in section 2 and fingerspell the word in section 3.
- c. Next, have the child print the word in the bottom space in section 3. You may want to begin by first writing the word yourself on a separate piece of paper or on chalk board.
- d. For more practice and to play a matching game, cut each page into sections 1, 2, and 3. You can also cut section 3 into smaller pieces. Have the child first match the fingerspelling with the picture in section 1, then match the printed word, and then the child's own printed word. Use any combination for matching **PRINTED WORD - SIGN, FINGERSPELLING, etc.**¹⁸

Teachers can also use pictures found in magazines, coloring books, Sunday School books, and other materials which will give the

¹⁸ Ralph Miller R., Sr., Sign Language Clowns (Berkeley: Dawn Sign Press, 1987), n.p.

children a variety of pictures. These pictures can correspond to the hand shapes and the picture of the child doing the sign. If possible, design or locate pictures which portray children from different racial groups doing the signing.

Another aspect of communication skills development is how children are taught about the English language. Some younger children are taught signed English to help them learn English structure, syntax, and grammar. If the child is learning this form of communication (or whatever form), it should be incorporated into the activity or lesson. This will help to reinforce what the child is learning at home and in school. Also, it gives the child, other hearing children in the classroom, and the leader a chance to learn from one another and feel each is contributing something to the other.

American sign language (ASL) is often the language which deaf persons use. Unlike Signed English, ASL is not based on signing an exact word for word English translation. It is an indigenous language among deaf people. Activities can be planned around using ASL as part of the class's general way of instruction as well as having particular lessons which teach ASL. Again, learning the language of the child, if the leader does not know it already, and being able to communicate with her or him, will make the child feel welcome.

2. Exploring Visual and Tactile Aids. When teaching deaf children, it is important to have concrete objects that they can see and if possible, touch. The visual and tactile aids allow

them to see what is being discussed and to begin making the connection about what is being communicated. For example, if the story for the lesson and activity is Noah's Ark, pictures of animals or plastic toy animals can be brought in as part of the discussion. A workshop manual by Gallaudet and Kendall for developing religious materials for deaf people suggested:

Before actually presenting the Noah story, teachers of young students might play an animal card game and introduce the names of animals, the idea of matching pairs, and maybe even discuss the differences between male and female species.¹⁹

These activities give children the opportunity to learn for example, what it means to walk "two-by-two" through seeing and touching the animals. There may be a point at which the leader and the children want to bring in live animals--hamsters, gerbils, goldfish as part of this lesson. This will facilitate participation and discussion about their responsibility as caretakers of God's creation.

The Special Education Resource Center of the Board of Jewish Education suggests that when blessings are being learned by deaf children and adults, signs and oral communication should be used to convey what is being said. In learning the blessing for lighting the Menorah, the signs are also pictured and the words are printed to help deaf and hearing persons learn the blessing.

Being able to touch is a powerful tool in learning. Through touch, deaf children can experience what particular words mean.

¹⁹ Workshop [manual] on Developing and Designing Religious Materials for Deaf People, n.p.

Hearing children have an advantage in learning this because they are constantly made aware of these connections by hearing and by touching. For example, hearing the phrase soft as a cloud brings up different types of connotations. A person who cannot hear, needs to be able to touch something soft when learning this phrase so that she or he begins to understand that a cloud is soft. Cotton balls, down feathers, or the children's clothing should be available for the children to touch so that they can have an idea about what is soft as a cloud.

A visual approach to encouraging students to dialogue can be found in Paulo Freire's technique. One aspect of Freire's literacy program is to have participants participate in culture group discussions. In these groups the adults are given pictures; they then discuss what they think about the pictures from many perspectives--economic, social, and nature. Using Freire's approach for deaf children could serve a two-fold purpose. The first purpose would be to stimulate dialogue among the children concerning what they think about the picture. Encouraging children to think and express themselves gives them support in learning how to communicate more effectively. The more children believe that their thoughts are valued and respected by others, the more they will appreciate their own thoughts and ways of expressing them. Since tactile skills are an important educational tool for deaf children, objects or pictures which the children can touch would also be helpful. (The pictures could have raised objects or felt on them.) The second purpose of this approach is that it helps

children in their reading. Most deaf children have difficulty learning to read. Identifying objects or pictures with written words will help them to learn new words and reinforce old words. Learning these words in the communication style that is used in the classroom will help to increase and sharpen the child's communication skills.

3. Learning About Similarities and Differences. Children, like adults, need to learn how to accept the similarities and the differences between people. If children can begin to accept these differences at an early age, hopefully, as they get to be adults, this attitude will stay with them. Being able to accept people for who they are is important for children and adults to learn. In the book, Including All of Us, which is a series of early childhood activities to learn about disability, this concept is included in one of the chapters of activities for children to begin exploring and learning. The activities help hearing and non-hearing children learn more about each other and themselves. As the authors state, "By recognizing the differences, but focusing on the similarities, children can come to accept people for who they are."²⁰

Through activities which discuss differences in children and how differences are good, children can learn that it is all right to be different. For example, in the book Including All of Us, there is a lesson entitled, "One Difference and Many Similarities." A brief overview of the activity is given below.

Purposes:

²⁰ Froschl et al., 32.

To help hearing and hearing-impaired children understand the many similarities among themselves. To reinforce children's knowledge about hearing impairment and hearing aids. To provide a positive role model of a child with a disability....

What Children Learn:

That all children, disabled and nondisabled, share a variety of emotions.

That all children, disabled and nondisabled, do many of the same things.

To observe and discuss the physical similarities and differences between themselves and the girl in the book

Who Am I? This is a story about an African-American girl and her family, who wears a hearing aid.

Format:

Large-group circle time for reading of book (15 minutes).

Activity:

1. Read Who Am I? to the class. Ask the children What is happening ? How does the girl in the picture feel?

2. If children do not notice by the end of the story that the girl is wearing a hearing aid, ask them if there is anything that is the same about the girl in the story and the new doll in the classroom. (A doll has been already been placed in the corner of the classroom. The doll is wearing a hearing aid and looks like the girl in the story. Talk about the hearing aid and how it helps the girl hear better. Ask 'Do we know someone else who wears a hearing aid?'

3. During the discussion of the book, emphasize the similarities between the girl in the book and the children in the classroom.²¹

Books, video-tapes, games, and resources should reflect concepts of similar and different. Pictures and posters which show children and adults who are deaf and with hearing aids,

²¹ Froschl et al., 40-41.

multiracial, and of different sexes can be used in the Sunday School classes, after-school programs, and during Vacation Bible School. Other materials and resources which show people with and without disabilities can be used.

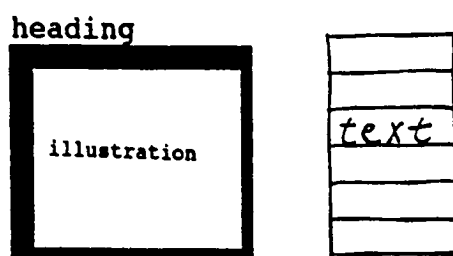
In the Bible, there are many examples of persons who have some type of disability. When learning about these people, the children could learn not only the significance of this person, but also what type of disability that this person had. Children will start learning how God works with people who have disabilities--speech impediments, blindness, deafness, and mobility impairments. An example of this is communicating with deaf children about Moses. Deaf children often have a difficult time learning how to pronounce words because they cannot hear the word being spoken to them. Therefore, the deaf child may become frustrated when she or he is unable to articulate a thought or an idea or if others do not understand her or him. "Sometimes the lack of verbal expression or inability to interpret fully a given situation accurately may frustrate him."²² As different characteristics are told about Moses, his speech impediment should be discussed as well and how he was afraid to do God's work because of this. Yet, God wanted Moses to be a leader and a spokesperson with his speech impediment. (Again, the idea is presented that our weakness is made strong through God working in us.) As children are learning about Moses and the events during this time, there is also an opportunity for

²² Joseph C. Giangreco and Marianne Ranson Giangreco, The Education of the Hearing Impaired (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1970), 32.

them to see and feel how they respond to persons with disabilities.

4. Presenting Clear, Rich Images. When designing or selecting materials for deaf children, there are some format considerations listed below which the Gallaudet and Kendall "Workshop on Developing and Designing Religious Materials for Deaf People" suggest may be helpful. As noted in Examples and Illustrations, graphics should only be used to focus attention, to clarify or to reinforce. However, when graphics such as illustrations or photographs are used, they should be labeled. Often, a brief sentence or two can be added under an illustration or photograph to further explain the graphic. With younger learners, it is often effective to include an illustration or photograph under side headings, as in the example below.

Picture 2



a. Type size. Use larger type than usual for younger deaf learners. Also, use larger or bold type to draw attention to important vocabulary, concepts, and ideas.

b. Consistency. Keep format, print characteristics, and graphics consistent throughout the instructional sequence. Use similar formats to introduce words or concepts, to provide practice, and to reinforce learning.

c. Shorten sentences, paragraphs, and explanations whenever possible. Use kernel sentences (subject-verb-object order).

d. Use simple vocabulary, unless teaching a new word or words.

e. Limit paragraph length for younger hearing-impaired students to eight sentences. (This will be shorter for the early elementary-age child.)²³

Any type of video-tapes, movies, television shows or media materials with words spoken in them, should also have captions shown on the screen. Deaf children will be able to follow the story line better. An important point to remember is to leave the lights on when viewing shows with written captions so that the children can see. Make sure the lighting in the room, seating for the children, the viewing equipment are located in a central spot for viewing.

5. Providing Role Models. Providing children with positive role models of other children, youth, and adults who are deaf will help children learn how to identify with someone else who is like them. There is (usually) only so much information that a hearing person can learn and give to a non-hearing child. Their experiences, expressions, and feelings about certain things will be different because they have learned things differently. Having teachers who are deaf, deaf youth who work with the younger children, deaf parents, deaf religious leaders (pastor included),

²³ Workshop [manual] on Developing and Designing Religious Materials for Deaf People, n.p.

will give children interaction in the church with those who are part of the deaf culture.

Burroughs stresses the need for African Americans to provide a positive image and actions that others can learn from. She challenges adults to establish businesses, own homes, and to have a good education. In doing these things and practicing their religious beliefs on a daily basis, the children will be given something to strive for. Projecting a positive image through positive actions will give the children a sense of strength and character.

Using Burroughs' emphasis for the deaf community can also help to create a sense of strength and connectedness among African American deaf persons. Such organizations as the Black Deaf Advocates and Deaf Pride work toward bringing a variety of information to those in the deaf community. Education and job information are examples of the information which the organizations offer. Burroughs' work also emphasizes the African American community working together for the good of all. As the African American community continues to be inclusive of deaf persons, the church and the African American community in general must recognize its responsibility to deaf persons.

Hopefully, these are some helpful guidelines that can help churches and communities of faith to learn that God's love is inclusive of all. The deaf culture is a different culture, but both hearing and non-hearing persons are part of God's family. Within each culture that are differences, yet, the love of God

serves as the foundation for sustaining and caring for all of us.

6. Helping to Develop a Sense of African American Pride. The first guideline is to help African American deaf children to develop a positive attitude and image about themselves as African Americans. This necessary sense of pride will help the child to cope with the problems she or he will face in the very color oriented society found in the hearing and non-hearing world. In the African American community, there is a strong need for children to develop a sense of pride about who they are--educationally, spiritually, socially, psychologically, emotionally, historically, and physically. The church still remains the well of water from which persons can draw their strength and find assistance to deal with various crises and other needs. Spiritual nourishment and direction are gifts that the church offers.

Designing religious education activities which will help children to think critically about their faith and history are also important. A way to begin challenging children to think critically about history is to have them role play. For example, deaf children could create a scenario in which Harriet Tubman is helping slaves gain their freedom. One child could play Harriet Tubman and the others could play the roles of slaves, slaveholders, and persons who are part of the underground railroad. Girls and boys should play the part of Harriet Tubman and the slaveholders. Through this type of role playing, the children can begin to think about what it meant to be a slave or slaveholder, why freedom is a right for everyone, and why achieving freedom is a struggle for

many persons. Deaf children and hearing children can benefit from this type of role playing.

In helping children to develop this sense of pride, the African American church is encouraging children to learn about the historical, educational, religious, and other contributions of the African American church to African Americans and to the larger community. By doing this, the church reinforces a sense of pride among African Americans. Children are told over and over that they are gifts from God and are given opportunities to learn how to develop and use the gifts God has given them. Pictures of African American children are displayed throughout the church to show their inclusion into God's family. The choir, plays, children's recreational and educational activities, and community programs are some of the many resources and programs available to the children.

Yet, if the child is not able to hear, she or he will not be able to take full advantage of these programs if they are not adapted to fit his or her needs. Deaf children need to know that they are part of the history from which African Americans have come. Burroughs thought that African Americans needed to know about their history. She made sure that the girls and women at the school took courses in African American history. During the retelling of the history of African Americans, the church should include the names of African American deaf persons who helped to bring about change for the better. When retelling the story of slavery, we must remember that many of the slaves did not speak the same language, and had to learn how to communicate through body

language and signs in addition to learning a new spoken language. This needs to be emphasized and told as well.

When programs and activities are being planned for children, deaf persons should be active participants in planning these programs so that the story of hearing and non-hearing African Americans is told. Include deaf children in the choir and allow them to do "solos" in sign language. It will look beautiful and the other hearing children will be learning something new that they can include in their lives in and outside of the church. When hanging pictures of children on the wall, find pictures of deaf African American children to include with the children who are listening to stories. Have someone signing the story to hearing and non-hearing children. Helping children to have a sense of pride about themselves as African Americans requires attention, time, and continually repeating the story of African Americans over and over again. Deaf children require additional time and attention. This story needs to be told in sign, through plays in which the body does most of the talking, and in short, simple stories that the children can understand.

7. Developing Deaf Pride among African American Children. Not only do deaf children need to develop a strong sense of who they are as African Americans, but they also need to develop a strong sense of deaf pride. Religious education in the church can do this by having persons who are deaf serve as leaders for the deaf and hearing children. This will give the children opportunities to see that non-hearing persons are contributing to the life of the

church. Also, include stories that discuss the life of children who are deaf and their families. Children will see that their family is represented when we talk about how everyone is included in God's family.

Develop activities and curriculum which are adaptable for deaf children. After-school programs should have interpreters and materials which are for deaf children. Local colleges, universities, programs for deaf children, and educational and recreational programs for deaf adults and youth, can serve as resources for interpreters and materials. Also, check with other denominations and religious groups about materials which are available that can be adapted for African American deaf children.

Another important guideline is to include parents and other family members in the educational process of the deaf child. Parents, family, and friends will be able to give information as to what the child is learning at school and at home. This give the teacher or group leader ideas as to what needs to be discussed and what type of communication the child is learning.

Burroughs not only advocated that black children to learn their history as a means of knowing and respecting themselves, she also believed cleanliness reflected a sense of pride that children should have for themselves. Cleanliness helps a person become disciplined and develop a better attitude. This attitude will help the children to feel good about themselves. The church reflects this attitude as well. The church is a place which stresses that cleanliness is an important value. Like Burroughs, the church

stresses black pride not only in knowing your history, but how you maintain yourself. Valuing cleanliness is a part of respecting yourself and developing a sense of pride about who you are.

8. Feeling through Vibrations. Within the African American church, a strong sense of rhythm is felt throughout the congregation in the music, the prayers, and preaching. The rhythms which are heard and felt by hearing people, help to give the flow of the service a spiritual emotion. This emotion helps to bring life to the service because the congregation is able to participate in the service by allowing their feelings to be touched. For example, if the choir is singing, "Precious Lord, Take My Hand," the tone of the choir and the depth from which they are asking God to help them make it along is felt by others who are also struggling.

Persons who are deaf will have a harder time in feeling and hearing these rhythms because they cannot hear. In order to hear these rhythms, deaf persons need to sit as close to the choirs as possible and the volume of the microphones needs to be turned up so that the sound of the music will be felt through the floor, if they are wooden.

The cadence of the preacher and the rhythm of the flow of the service are important to understanding what is going on. If possible, during the worship service, allow the deaf children to bring a balloon with them into the service. They will be able to feel the vibrations of the song and the sounds of the preacher through the balloon. (Of course this will need to be planned, but

it can work.) The African American church is a very oral community. Hearing the preacher and the choir adds to having a better worship experience. The balloon will allow the child to feel the vibrations of the service and have a better understanding of the words that are being signed and the events which are taking place.

9. Encouraging Expression. Another important guideline is to encourage deaf children to express what they are learning or want to share with others about their faith. Usually during Sunday School, prayer time, musical selections, testimonies, the sermon, and other events in the church and the community, the spoken word is central. Therefore, when programs are planned, there should be opportunities for deaf children to express themselves.

Since religious education involves the entire life of the church and the community, the various activities and events which are in the church and the community, should be planned in a way that will allow opportunities for the children to participate. Plays, Girl or Boy scouts, art work, children's groups, Sunday School, and choir are some of the many programs which can allow deaf children to interact and share with others about their faith and feelings. Also, there should be opportunities for the hearing community to listen and learn from the deaf community through music, sermons, and so forth. Being able to express your faith is important to help others and yourself learn more about what you think and how this belief may challenge or deepen another person's belief. Deaf children need as many experiences as possible to

express their faith and for others to respond to and/or support their expressions.

Summary

The guidelines offered here are suggestions to help focus the attention of the congregation and the developers of religious education materials on the needs of deaf and hearing persons. Although the focus was on African American deaf children and the African American church, the guidelines are not limited to these two communities. Through the involvement of various faith communities, guidelines and activities for the church and deaf children have been designed. As more ecumenical groups come together to share in developing religious education materials for deaf children in general, the many faith communities can benefit from this effort. Each of the faith groups will have particular needs to address, but the collective effort will produce ideas and enhance the materials of everyone. Also, if the hearing and deaf communities within the various faith groups can join together, both groups can learn from one another.

Hearing persons involved in designing materials for deaf persons need to be aware of the similarities and the differences between the deaf and hearing. The differences should not be barriers, but should challenge the hearing and deaf communities as to how to make changes which will benefit both communities. For example, churches will realize that smoke detectors need to be installed with flood lights on them. This will help both the deaf and hearing people. The lights help to signal those who may not

hear the smoke detector for some reason.

Providing visual and tactile resources for deaf children is important. Because the language used in the church is often abstract, structuring the information to be discussed in more concrete terms and providing visual images whenever possible will help the deaf children better understand the topic. Having classes and activities designed with the opportunity to touch objects and discuss ideas is also a significant way of helping the children to learn. For example, when telling a Bible story, have pictures or objects which help to convey the message of the story. If the story is about the sower, have seeds available and different plants to illustrate what happens when the seeds are planted in the right type of soil.

As Burroughs and Freire would challenge the church, religious educators should remember to provide a variety of opportunities for the children to learn. Do not think that one way is the only way. Both Freire and Burroughs would encourage the education of the deaf children in the church to involve learning about deaf culture as well. Be willing to bring in stories about African American deaf people as well, including the participation of black deaf persons in the history of the black church. Deaf persons should be included as part of the whole history of the community and the church.

Freire's work sets forth the idea that persons who are oppressed should engage in critical thinking through dialogue. The dialogue is stimulated by persons sharing their thoughts and

feelings about their social and political reality. This form of communication is a natural part of the African American church. Deaf children should be taught, as black children in general are taught, that racial barriers are present in this country and how to deal with them. Deaf African American children need to be aware of the problems they may face. They need to learn ways to cope with them.

Just as Burroughs incorporated development of racial pride in her educational program, the church needs to lift up black pride among all African Americans. This pride is not only based on discovering the history of African Americans but also on learning to have respect for oneself and others. Respecting yourself and others is very much connected to cleanliness for Burroughs.

Burroughs' emphasis on cleanliness to help persons feel better about themselves can be found in the following example given by Jeffrey Bowden. Bowden is a sign interpreter, youth worker, and president of the National Conference of Deaf Black Baptist. Bowden, who was a dorm counselor for deaf boys at a residential school for the deaf, decided that every Friday the boys in his dorm would have to dress up and be neat. At first, some of the boys objected, but the dorm counselor told them to try it and see how other people would look at them. The boys became very enthusiastic because the teachers and others told them how nice they looked. This caused the boys to start taking better care of themselves and to feel better about themselves. This new attitude carried over into how others treated them and how they treated themselves. The

boys began developing more respect for themselves. This also caused others to show more respect toward them.²⁴

Religious education materials for deaf children contribute to the building of respect. If the church wants to broaden its understanding of ministry, the church will need to continue developing the fullness of its ministry to include African American deaf persons and the many others who have been neglected or excluded. As the church critiques and enlarges its understanding of ministry, more persons will be able to sit at the banquet table that God has already prepared for everyone.

²⁴ Jeffrey Bowden, interview with author, 3 February 1992.

CHAPTER 9

Religious Education Activities for African
American Children Who Are Deaf

The religious education activities for African American deaf children discussed in this chapter will be informed by the guidelines described in the last chapter. For example, pictures and other graphics will be used to highlight the particular lesson or word and consistency in format and lettering will be followed. If questions are asked of children about a story, the What, Why, Where, and When questions should be used. Deaf children have a more difficult time understanding questions that begin with how, which require more than a short one or two word answer.

All children need to have opportunities to build their self-esteem and self-image. African American children need this type of reinforcement to help them develop a better understanding of who they are and to have a healthier perspective about their race. As people of faith, we need to incorporate the love of God, self, and others into the many facets of our lives. Through this love, we can learn how to live a more holistic and healthy life. Religious education is a vehicle to express and show children about God's love, love of self, and love of others.

The overall structure of religious education--including the activities, resources, and programs--can provide African American deaf children with different ways of learning about different aspects of the faith. In addition, religious education provides a means for the children to develop their cognitive skills, social

skills, emotional development, and assist in bringing family and the child closer together. Positive images and self-esteem building activities for African American children are needed to help them create a better image of themselves.

An important part of developing lessons or activities is the planning and preparation by the teachers or leader. The following list of questions from the Gallaudet and Kendall workshop on designing religion materials for deaf people are provided as instructional guidelines for the instructor. It should be noted that the developers of these five questions note that the questions are for instructors of hearing and non-hearing children.

--What do I want students to know or do?

--What do students need to understand before I begin this lesson?

--What do I do to present this information in a meaningful way?

--What resources will I need?

--What will students do to show they learned the information?¹

These questions can be helpful in assisting the instructor to prepare for the lesson or activity through which she or he will guide the children through. Having a plan and an idea of what you want to do will help when things do not always go as planned and give the instructor a sense of direction about what to do.

In the following activities, biblical themes and stories will be emphasized through the use of science, storytelling, creative

¹ Workshop [manual] on Developing and Designing Religious Materials for Deaf People, n.p.

arts, and sign language. Deaf children learning about their faith need educational and fun activities which will encourage them to want to learn and enjoy learning. These activities are not only for learning about their faith, but will also increase their awareness of issues and concepts in their everyday experiences at school, home, and with their friends. Hopefully, the knowledge; positive sense of self; fun; and love for God, Christ, and others they learn from church will carry through in other aspects of their lives.

Each of the activities has a preparation guide for the leader and an activity section for the student. (These activities can be adapted for use with hearing children as well.)

Storytelling

In the African American church, being able to tell a story and the story of Jesus' death and resurrection are significant part of the worship service. If the children are using sign language (i.e., ASL) as a form of communication, then telling the story through signing, which includes body language and facial expressions, will give more life and meaning to the story. The children will also enjoy seeing the story come to life.

Younger children love animated people, fairy tales, and other lively action. Bruno Bettelheim discusses this in his book, The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales. Bettelheim states, "Like all great art, fairy tales both delight and instruct; their special genius is that they do so in terms

which speak directly to children."² The role of fairy tales as a way of helping children to develop their imaginations and their personalities is significant in the child's development toward wholeness. In discussing Bible stories with the child, the child can develop her or his imagination. For example, the parables are good stories to use in encouraging children to use their imagination. The parable of the mustard seed or the sower are two parables which children can relate to. The children have general knowledge of what a seed is and how the seeds need to be cared for in order to grow into plants, flowers, trees, and etc. Finding stories which can relate to the child's experience as well as develop new ideas and thoughts, will help the child to broaden her or his thinking.

Instructor preparation

Instructor preparation is an important part of storytelling. Being prepared will help the instructor have more confidence in her or himself and feel relaxed in telling the story. The storyteller should practice telling the story to others before she or he begins telling the story to the class. This will help the storyteller focus on particular movements or points which need illustrating and become comfortable with the story. (If the storyteller is a hearing person or a deaf person who has not worked with children before, practice will help them feel more comfortable and relaxed with the children.)

² Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 53.

The Lutheran Church in America designed an excellent workbook book entitled Workshop Designs for Educational Ministry. This workbook is a collection of curriculum guidelines, suggestions, cassettes, and other related details that parents, teachers and other leaders can use in designing religious education activities and lessons for children, youth, and adults. The activities were designed to increase the church's support of religious education through the various (power holding) groups in the church. The guidelines for leader preparation are helpful and can be adapted to fit different religious education programs' needs.

In the following section, the guidelines from the Lutheran Church of America's outline for studying and practicing storytelling is presented for persons to use in learning how to tell stories to children. This lesson has been prepared for workshop attendees who would spend 1 1/2 hours learning how to tell a story. The full lesson is not presented here, but excerpts which are helpful have been highlighted and adapted to address the needs of the storyteller. Some modifications must be made in working with deaf children. Unless the child is learning oral communication only, the stories should be practiced in the form of signing that the child is learning. Also, if the story will present a new concept or idea for the child, maybe a short game or song before the story is read could be played so that the child can have some framework from which to make a connection between the story and what she or he has experienced.

Activity 1: "Just Plain Bible Storytelling"

Objective: To study and practice the fine art of storytelling-

- By reviewing what children like about storytelling.
- By learning preparatory skills for good storytelling.
- By telling Bible stories.

What Children Like About Storytelling:

Some of the following characteristics are what children like about storytelling and should be kept in mind when designing, writing, and telling stories to children. Children like stories that have rhyme, rhythm, repetition, single theme, imagination, dramatic, happy ending, action, and sermon free.

Preparing for Storytelling:

Select a story such as "Jesus Visited Zacchaeus." An introduction of the story will need to be prepared by the leader. For example, something that will direct the attention of the children to the story and catch their interest. Some examples might be:

- A. Have you ever climbed a tree?
- B. Do you wish you were taller?
- C. I want to tell you one of my favorite Bible stories.
- D. Who knows what kind of tree this leaf is from?

Background information for use in your presentation.

- Read it (the story) often; be familiar with the story. Read it aloud.
- See the story as a whole composed of three parts. Most children's stories have short introductions and endings.
- Be familiar with the background of biblical stories. Borrow books from your pastor or invest in a few good biblical resources to provide information about words, geography, purpose, life-styles, clothing, etc.
- Take each character and get "inside" how he or she

felt. What did mean to Zaacheus to climb the tree and to see Jesus? How did Jesus feel about his visit? Can you picture the tree, house, and the road? This process will give your story characters dimension which will make them real.

- Plan a brief introduction which will catch the children's interest.

- Tell your story to your family, neighborhood children, the local Rotary Club, or yourself while bathing.

Telling the Story

Gather the children close to you so that you can maintain good eye contact. You may sit or stand while telling the story; practice both and select the way that feels more comfortable. Make sure you and the children are comfortable. Notes on a 3- by 5-inch card may be helpful. Under no circumstances should you read the story. Weave children's interruptions into the story. After the story is finished, invite reactions to the story. Encourage both positive and negative feedback. Being seated while telling the story will help to minimize your role as the person to whom others are to direct their comments toward. And most of all, enjoy!³

The suggestions listed above will help the storyteller to feel more relaxed and able to tell the story for the children to enjoy and listen to. With deaf children, keeping eye contact will be very important in helping them to understand what the story is about. Since this is a story being presented, the signing during the story can be signs which seem more natural in gesture or which are representative of something that the children are already

³ David Geischen et al., Workshop Designs for Educational Ministry (Philadelphia: Lutheran Church in America, Division for Parish Services, 1985), 11-13.

familiar with to describe something.

Activity 2: "A Short Story/Fable to Share"

Supplies: Suggested Materials - Aesop's Fable, The People Who Could Fly, Afro-Bets Book Of Black Heroes A to Z

All African American children should begin learning as early as possible about the contributions of African Americans. In the area of literature, there are several outstanding short story writers, poets, novelists, and others who have given much to the field of literature. There is a longstanding tradition of short stories and fables, which have been passed on from generation to generation. Examples of these are the stories of Brer Rabbit and Aesop's Fables. There is also a collection of slave stories from the book The People Who Could Fly which can be adapted and told to children. These stories and fables are from the slaves and from Africa. As children grow older and learn these stories and these fables in more detail, they will come to realize that these stories and fables are part of their culture. Children and adults love these stories. These stories can be a great way of communicating certain religious principles and survival techniques that children may need to know as they grow older.

A good fable to tell deaf children is from Aesop's Fables-- "The Boy and The Nuts." In this fable the characters can be acted out and the words can be signed in the child's language and through gestures and movements which seem to be a natural part of the movement of the story.

The Boy and The Nuts

A Boy put his hand into a pitcher, which was half full of

Nuts, and grasped just as many of them as his fingers could hold. But when he tried to take them out, his hand caught in the narrow neck, and he began to cry. At this, his father said: Foolish Boy! Take only half as much at one time:

Lesson/Thought: Greed defeats itself (or don't be greedy.)⁴

Some stories may be told that include the children acting out certain parts in the story. This can be fun and encourages the children to participate and look-listen for even more details about what is happening in the story. Children like seeing other children, themselves, or seeing-hearing their names in stories or something which is personally connected to them.

Activity 3: "Famous African American Inventors and Other Famous People"

Supplies: Famous Black Heroes, or A Salute to Black Scientists and Inventors, or a book or pictures about famous African Americans

Encouraging deaf children to believe in themselves and that they have gifts and abilities is a necessary part of helping these children to develop self-confidence. God wants us to love ourselves and others. Yet, we cannot learn to love others if we do not love ourselves. Unfortunately, low self-esteem is often a prominent characteristic of African American children in general. Deaf children, like all children, need to be encouraged to think well of themselves. Often, African American children are not aware of the many contributions that African Americans have made. The following activity teaches children to learn about famous African

⁴ Aesop's Fables (Mount Vernon, N.Y.: Peter Pauper Press, 1941), 12.

American inventors and other famous African Americans. This encourages them to feel proud of their race, and to stimulate thoughts of inventions that the child may want to make.

Before discussing famous African American inventors and their inventions, have a discussion about the meaning of inventions, and list inventions that we all use--telephone, refrigerator, crayons. Ask the children to name something which someone made that they use. (With younger children, using the word made is helps in their understanding of inventions.)

In a brown paper bag, the leader can have various objects which can be pulled out from the bag for the children to describe what they are used for. Or, a car with and without wheels can be used for discussion about how cars need round wheels to move and how someone invented (made) these wheels.

From the AFRO-BETS collection of books about African-Americans, there is a book entitled Book of Black Heroes from A to Z by Wade Hudson and Valerie Wilson Wesley. This book gives the reader biographical information about two to three famous African and African Americans for each letter of the alphabet. Each entry has a picture of the famous person and one the AFRO-BETS KIDS at the bottom of the page for the children to see. The AFRO-BET KIDS are guides for the children to use with in the book.

In the book, A Salute to Black Scientists and Inventors, edited by Richard L. Green, various African-American scientists and inventors are listed. Biographical information about each one is included as well as a picture of the person. A diagram of some of

the patented inventions of these famous people is provided for the reader. This book is written more for junior high school and older persons, but selected information can be highlighted and told in story form for younger children to understand. The biographical sketches are good, brief summaries about the person for the leader to read and learn from.

The illustrations of each of the persons is helpful because they give the child an opportunity to see who is being discussed. Also, the leader may want to display posters of some of these persons on the wall in the classroom. One or two names from the book, corresponding to and letters of the alphabet, could be discussed every week until the letters of the alphabet are finished. During this time, the letters of the alphabet, and the names of the persons would be signed by the leader and the children. This would help the children to practice their fingerspelling and signing. Also, the students and the leader can make up sign names for each of the person. Sign names are signs or a sign about a particular person or thing which describes this person without actually signing his name. For example, if George Washington Carver is discussed, then a the sign for "Peanut" could be used instead of saying his name since he developed many inventions using the peanut.

After the information about each person is presented in story form to the children, and discussion has taken place about who and what the person did, then the children can draw pictures which represent something that this person invented. Or, each child can

be given play dough and allowed to make something that represents what the inventor or famous person did. Depending on the time, the children can draw or use play dough to create their own invention and tell the class about it. The pictures or play dough inventions can be taken home to share with family and friends.

Activity 4: "Creation and Responsibility"

Supplies: Milk cartons or containers (1/2 pint), paper cups, seeds, soil, water, paper strips, marker, newspaper

After children hear the story about George Washington Carver and his many, many contributions, children can learn how to grow and care for plants themselves. Learning to care for all of God's creations is important for children to learn. An activity which will help children in learning about the significance of this, is having children grow their own plants. Through learning how plants grow and learning how to care for their own plants, children can begin to take responsibility for caring for God's creations. This activity not only emphasizes the importance of plants and how we can help nurture them, but also investigative skills and science concepts (i.e., hypotheses, observation,) will be encouraged and reinforced. If there is space in the room, an area for plants can be designated as "Plant Space or Our Garden Area." This is the area where children can do the actual planting of the seeds, look at pictures of various plants and flowers, and display any pictures or any information they have to share with the class about plants.

The leader can begin this activity by talking about different things that God has created for us. List things like air, water, plants, and trees. After this discussion, the leader can then tell

the class that she or he wants to share a story about some of the things God created. Genesis 1:20-23 can be read and the leader and the children can discuss their understanding of what things God made and how do we use these things. During the discussion, the leader may want to repeat some of things listed in the scripture if the children do not say them. Note: The workshop manual on religious education materials designed by the Lutheran Church of America recommends that the word "made" be used instead of "creation" to help children understand what is being presented.⁵

After the children have given different examples of "God's creation," the leader can ask the children what can we do to help keep these things (whatever they have said) in good condition and looking good. The leader can begin by saying, "We can keep the streets and our church clean and looking nice by not throwing down trash." What can we do to help keep the grass green and pretty? Other questions can be asked which will help the children to think about we all need to do to help keep things clean and cared for.

After this discussion, each student should be given a seed to look at and touch. The leader can ask questions like "What does the seed feel like?" or "What do you think will grow from this seed?" Following this, the leader will let students know that each of them will be planting seeds and growing a plant. It will be their responsibility "or duty" to take care of the plant by watering it and making sure it has enough light to grow.

In the plant area or on the child's work space, newspaper

⁵ Geischen et al., 27.

should be spread out for children to work on. Each child should have a paper cup, a milk carton, and lima bean seeds. In the container, each child should put about a cup of soil in the container, then put a seed in the container, and then another 1/2 cup of soil over the lima bean seed. The plant should be watered with about 1/2 cup of water. Each child should place the paper strip into the soil so that only about a quarter of the paper strip is in the soil. (These strips can be marked with a red line near the bottom of the strip for how far you want them to push it into the soil. Each time the plant grows the child marks the strip of paper. Or the strips can be placed beside each child's plant and measured against the plant, and then the child can mark the strip of paper. Leaders should make sure the child's name is on the back of the strip.) The plants should be placed in the windowsill or near the light. If possible, there should be at least two instructors assisting the children and answering questions.

Within a few days the seeds will begin to germinate. If possible, have the custodian or someone else who will have access to the room come and water the plants on the third day after they have been planted. Explain to the children that this must be done to make sure the plants have enough water to keep them alive. After the seeds have been planted, discuss with the children what things will need to be done to keep the plants alive and what the children must do to help this happen. In three weeks, there should be healthy lima bean plants in the room. Children will enjoy watering and checking on their plants. After the plants have grown

a few inches, the children can take them home. The leaders should have planted a few plants also so that the class can give one to the person who watered their plants for them during the week and also to some special persons in the church to whom the children would like to say "Thanks".

There are several helpful questions to ask the deaf children about their plants. The children can refer to their paper strips to help them answer these questions. "Who had the shortest plant? Who had the tallest plant? Who had a plant that was not growing? On what date did (or do you think) your plant stopped growing? Who had the plant that grew the fastest?"⁶ A sign or a calendar should be marked for the class to see which day and date their seeds were planted.

During the planting of the seeds and as they grow, Leitman suggest that the leader

can urge students to concentrate on seeing what has happened, while encouraging them to remember what they did with the plants. Why things happened can be fruitfully pursued after deaf children have indeed noted that the incident has taken place. Questions that seek explanations as to why such a thing happened generally should be referred back to the child in order to encourage further inquiry.⁷

Through the discovery of plants, children can learn how to help take care of part of God's creation. Hopefully, this will encourage them to learn more about plants and flowers and eventually, how humanity and plants need one another. The need for

⁶ Allan Leitman, Science for Deaf Children (Washington, D.C.: Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf, 1968), 42.

⁷ Ibid.

nature and humanity to work together is a lesson that should begin at an early age.

Celebration in Worship

Contrary to what most hearing people believe, deaf children can hear sounds (unless there is absolutely no ability to hear anything) and "deaf children love to hear sounds."⁸ According to Leitman, "the proportion of pleasure received will be directly related to the frequency that a child uses whatever amount of hearing he may have."⁹ Deaf children can learn different sounds through such instruments as drums and whistles. The instruments produce varying of frequencies that will help a child discriminate between the various sounds. Being able to distinguish between low and high sounds is important for the child's learning process as is noted in the following paragraph:

Games that involve pointing in the direction from which sounds are made and discrimination between high and low sounds (a drum and a recorder are just two instruments that should be available for this kind of exploration) are important skill-building exercises that the individual deaf child will need above and beyond any particular subject matter requirements. These skills will aid the individual's learning simply because they provide one more sensory 'fix' on incoming data.¹⁰

Music has always been a vital part of the African American community. From the blues to opera, from the trumpet to the piano, African Americans have created new sounds of music for the world to enjoy and to convey the history and condition of African Americans

⁸ Ibid., 29.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

in general. Music, known as the universal language, translates the feelings, thoughts, and actions of people into sounds that the heart can hear, soothes the mind and soul, and brings delight to the soul. The music of African Americans in the various churches can provide an overview of how the church celebrates in worship, gives praises to God, what the theology of the church is, and how the people understand what their role is in response to God and their situation in life. The rich gift of music can be is for all persons. Persons who are deaf can feel the rhythm of the music through the vibrations of the sounds. (Often at parties, if the music is played loud enough, then the vibrations of the music can be felt through the dance floor and the walls.)

Another example of how music can be communicated to deaf persons is the following description of something that happened one Sunday at Metropolitan Baptist Church in Washington D.C. In the church, when the choir started singing and the chorus was being sung over and over, someone else started singing another part of the song. Then a third person or person(s) started humming or singing "Jesus" softly. Finally, three signers stood up and started signing. This allowed the deaf persons to have a fuller understanding of what was being sung. There is such power and beauty in this that a person cannot but feel the spirit of God moving through the service.

Activity 5: "Drumming to the Beat"

Supplies: One oatmeal box and lid per child, construction paper or brown bags, crayons, scissors, cellophane tape or glue/paste (the leader will need to decide how to set-up for using

the glue/paste or tape)

Preparation: Measure and cut enough sheets of paper or brown bag paper to wrap around the oatmeal box. (To save time, the teacher can wrap and glue the papers on the boxes.)

This activity is for deaf children to learn about the history of the African drum and how drums have been used in the church and in religious services. This activity will help the children learn to become more familiar with the sound of the drum. If possible, have someone who knows and plays the African drum and is familiar enough with the history of the drum and how it is often used in the church to come and share with the class. If this person is not available, a drum could be rented from a local music store and information about the drum could be learned from the music store as well as the music director of the church.

The person who will lead the discussion on drums should write the word out or have a card with drum written on it for the children to see. Next, the word drum should be signed. Each child should have the opportunity to sign and say the word. Each child should be given an opportunity to touch the drum and to rap on the drum. The drummer could tell a story of what the drum means and what it is used for and someone could sign this presentation for the children. If the leader must sign and present, then a brief story about the drum could be told which includes using the drum.

After the drummer has finished her or his story, the children can make their own drums from oatmeal boxes. First, the leader can review some of the words and information that were learned

about the drum. For example, the leader may want to ask, "What did you feel when you felt the drum?" or "Is the drum hard or soft?" or "What did you like about the drum?"

Following this brief discussion, each child is given a sheet of construction paper or a brown paper bag paper to decorate by drawing pictures or other decorations on the paper. Next, the decorated sheets will be wrapped around the box and either taped or glued on. (The leader will need to help younger children with the taping or gluing of the paper on the box.) If tape is being used, tape one edge of the paper over the next edge. If glue is used, have the children put some glue on the box and a strip of glue going down one edge of the construction paper. The leader should write or have the children (if possible) put their initials or names on the bottom of the boxes. After the drums have been decorated and taped or glued, place the lids securely on the boxes. The children can now play and sing their own songs or a song together!

Note: Whenever activities should be practiced before being demonstrated to the class. The plant activity can be done at home by the leader a week or two in advance. This will give the leader the opportunity to see what may happen.

These activities are designed to help stimulate the deaf child's thinking about the African-American community, provide an introduction or reinforcement of religious themes, and to open new doors to learning and fun for the children. As the children continue to learn and grow, hopefully, their faith will grow and be

challenged as well. Having and learning new things provide opportunities for deaf children to build on their experiences and to expand their depth of knowledge.

Significance for the Broader Religious

Education Community

Religious education cannot be confined to the Sunday School walls of a church or temple. There are new federal regulations which state that new buildings under construction, work places, and other public facilities must accommodate persons with disabilities. Also, the new equal rights law which is designed to benefit persons with disabilities sets a new tone for the public.

The church does not come under the same laws or federal supervision because of the separation of church and state; yet the church should be the place which is leading the fight to make changes for persons with disabilities. Faith communities should provide examples and leadership for equity and inclusiveness. Unfortunately, while the church is making some progress in changing its physical structure, curriculum, programs, attitudes, and actions toward persons with disabilities, it has far to go before it is able to say, "We Are All God's Children." The family of God must continually be challenged to be open to the differences as well as the similarities that people bring. Within each of us is the God-like spirit which can sustain and help us.

While the issue of equality for deaf persons is being brought to the public's attention through appearances on television shows (such as Marla Mattison), movies, and religious programs (in the

church and the community) which are signed for deaf persons, more interaction is needed between the hearing community and the deaf community. Hopefully, this will increase the knowledge that the two groups have about one another and tear down some of the barriers between them.

Religious education in general must broaden its scope to include everyday life experiences of people of different cultures, races, genders, and abilities. Designing programs and religious education resources for African American deaf children is one way to expand the scope of materials for religious education. These materials should serve as a means for exploring different ways to make the Word of God come to life for those who cannot hear. The songs, stories, scriptures, and plays which emphasize the love of Jesus Christ to children should be adapted so that non-hearing children can fully participate. Many churches have before and after-school programs. The activities which are planned for the children could be adapted for hearing and non-hearing children.

Another important aspect of this work is to reexamine how religious education is thought about and how to design curriculum and religious education resources for children. As stated previously, there is no one meaning for religious education, but the various denominations and faith communities decide the scope and limits of their particular religious education program. Religious educators need to revise their thinking the make up of the group which will be using the various materials. Making the Word of God relevant for all people means including persons with

different skills, talents, and abilities, persons who represent various segments of our culture, in team efforts to design programs.

Persons with various disabilities should be in key leadership positions throughout the faith communities so that children and adults can learn and know that different people with different abilities can be leaders. Not all superintendents of Conferences or bishops should be males who are in a relatively normal physical state. Persons in wheelchairs, the hearing impaired, and the blind should occupy some of these key positions.

By developing religious educational resources for deaf African American children, by reinterpreting religious educational themes, by learning how to communicate the spoken word and written word for deaf African American children, the definition of what religious education is and its practical application will be broadened.

Deaf children are just one segment of the faith community who can benefit from a new design and implementation of programs for African American deaf children. Another segment of the faith community which can benefit from this work is the older generation. As the population grows older, how will the church respond to the needs of the elderly? The church is one of the few communities in which the elderly often have the power and authority to make decisions and changes. As parishioners become older, their ability to hear is often lessened; yet, curriculum for older persons usually includes reading materials, lecture, and discussion. What meaningful communication can take place if persons cannot hear one

another but pretend that everything is fine? A new form of communication must be learned. Designing materials for elderly persons should take into consideration their visual and hearing needs. For example, large lettering is needed so that the lessons are easier to read.

Another area which needs to be expanded in religious education is education within the seminaries for persons who are studying and training to become ministers, pastors, and lay leaders in the church. At this time seminaries do not emphasize that religious education is the educational process of the entire church. What the church advocates about God and Christ should be expressed in preaching, worship, the physical facilities and so forth. The pictures and portraits on the walls, the church's community involvement, the music that the choirs sing, and the way people dress for church are part of how a church teaches the congregation about theology and religious education.

If the seminaries and other academic communities would emphasize religious education from a different perspective, the complexion and structure of religious education would change. There would be more emphasis on how to conduct religious education for persons with special educational needs. The scope of religious education would be broader. Furthermore, seminary education would be broadened, developing more consciousness of those within the seminary community with special abilities and those outside of the community with whom the seminary needs to relate. Theology would no longer be taught as "Black Theology 101" or "Systematic Theology

102." Theology would be include many theologies and acknowledge people who "hear" theology and "hear" the Word of God in different ways.

The power of the spoken word is very important in the seminary because of the lectures, conferences, and preaching that are a natural part of the hearing community. When deaf persons wrote their theological perspective of "God said, Let there be light..." (Gen. 1:3), the theological interpretation will take on a different and fresh meaning.

Also, such books and religious education resources as the Encyclopedia of Religious Education should include entries about religious education for deaf children and other educational materials related to children and adults with disabilities. Discussions of cognitive development in religious education books should include aspects of the developmental stages and process that are related to children and adults with disabilities. Often the materials are limited to children with so-called normal developmental abilities; other children are not included, or they are included only as addendums.

Another form of education that could be expanded would be intergenerational activities that include adults with disabilities who serve as role models for all children. Intergenerational activities would help the adults feel needed and give the children a chance to interact with persons who may be like them, but also different in terms of age and abilities.

Adults and children would learn how to be more sensitive to

the needs of others and could help one another to learn different things. For example, if an adult is deaf and does sign language, she or he could be a storyteller for younger deaf children. Sign language could be a part of the child's learning experience. At the same time, the adult who is telling the story is able to share a part of his or life with the children. This will help the adult feel a part of the church and the children's lives. Children enjoy stories and seeing a story told to them by someone who can sign can even give them the opportunity to learn a new language and to develop their small motor and cognitive skills.

If the structure and the framework of religious education is expanded beyond the hearing population, then other possibilities for creating a caring congregation will become realized. Persons who sign can form a choir. It is very beautiful and moving to see persons signing songs. This is an experience which can touch the depths of someone's soul and attract the attention of one's heart and mind. Words can often be ignored or blocked out with ease, but it is much more difficult to block out a persons face, body, and hands singing to you in such a poetic form.

Another possibility is to have persons on the usher board who are deaf and/or mentally retarded. Ushers are important to the worship service because they are the ones who help guide people to their seats and make sure the flow of the service is as smooth as possible when the congregation moves (e.g., to the communion table, to the offering table). Churches sometimes think of including persons with disabilities as their mission or rescue work. Instead

of having only separate programs and activities for persons with disabilities, all activities and programs should include persons who have disabilities. In Washington, D.C., Mt. Airy Baptist Church has an usher program which includes persons who are mentally retarded. Persons within the congregation work with a group of young adults and teach them how to usher during the worship service. This not only allows the ushers to become a part of the fellowship and to actively participate in the worship experience at the church, but the parishioners are able to see that former limitations can be developed and become strengths.

This reminds those who have the ability to see, hear, think, and walk that whatever impairments we may have, we are not to be limited by them. Also, persons are reminded that we can work together, regardless of our different abilities. God's family is made up of all people, regardless of their color, physical appearance, and capabilities. Regardless of what we think are our limitations, God provides us with rams in the bushes to help us out of our difficult situations. Learning to be more sensitive to the needs of others can help all of us grow.

Conclusion

In various ways God reminds us that "we have a long way to go before God's house is in fact a 'a house of prayer for all people.'"¹¹ Kushner's words ring true when we look at who are the members and (excluded) non-members of God's house. Religion has often been a leader in perpetuating the idea that persons who are

¹¹ Kushner, n.p.

deaf are not complete human beings. According to Sacks, such terms as "'deaf and dumb' or 'deaf and mute' referred to a supposed inadequacy of those born deaf to speak."¹² The church has also used these negative phrases to refer to deaf persons.

From a theological perspective, the biblical witness to the humanity of all illustrates that each of us has the image of God within us. The scriptures inform us that Jesus set the banquet table for the "least of these" and not a table for the rich and "perfect." Just as we have strengths, we all have limits which keep us from functioning to our fullest capacity; however, we also have God within us to sustain and guide us. It is the power of God's love which serves as the powerful force that allows each of us to share our blessings from God. Love and sensitivity to the needs of others are necessary in sharing God's Word with others.

The power of the spoken and written word must be taken seriously when planning activities for religious education programs. Not being able to hear or speak in a language that is acceptable to others can make communication with others a difficult experience. Hearing people do not realize that deaf persons are

perfectly capable of speech-they have the same speech apparatus as anyone else; what they lack is the ability to hear their own speech, and thus to monitor its sound by ear. Their speech, therefore, may be abnormal in amplitude and tone, with many omitted consonants and other speech sounds, sometimes so much so as to be unintelligible. Since deaf people cannot monitor their speech by ear, they have to learn how monitor it by other senses-by vision, touch, vibration-sense, and

¹² Sacks, 25.

kinesthesia.¹³

Even though language for deaf children may be hard for hearing persons to understand, encouraging children to speak may help them learn to articulate their thoughts. At the same time, it is important to remember that hearing and non-hearing persons have different experiences and we need to remember that this difference is important in how we relate to God's word. We all come to God with different experiences, and learning how to accept others is significant for both children and adults.

Religious education for deaf children within the church will take dedicated and willing workers to make changes in the curriculum and overall educational program of the church. These changes will be helpful not only to the deaf children, but also to their families and to other church members. Adults and children can learn together about hearing and communicating God's gospel in ways that make it alive and open for everyone to experience.

As the church continues to respond to the needs of deaf children, it must also prepare the church members to become inclusive of the needs of deaf children. This inclusiveness includes worship, choir, Sunday School, after-school programs, recreational programs, books, video-tapes, and other resources which are used within the life of the church and the church community. It is not enough for the church to have religious education activities for deaf and hearing children; we need to make changes within the entire life of the church. A foundation within

¹³ Ibid.

the church should be established that breeds openness and creativity to express thoughts and feelings and to participate actively the life of the church.

Religious education should include deaf persons helping to construct and implement the various programs. The leadership of deaf persons and other persons with disabilities provides deaf children with the opportunity to see persons who are like themselves, actively participating in leadership roles in the church. Positive role models can assist children in learning to like themselves.

Helping deaf children to establish pride and a positive identity is necessary. Deaf children need to believe that deafness is not a curse and that they are still loved by God and others. This love must be put into action and shown to children. When inviting all persons to dine at the table with Jesus, no one should be excluded or eliminated. Christ's death and resurrection were for all, and the reign of God must include the blind, maimed, deaf, and all who are rejected and despised by others. God's love for the outcast is the center of God's love, and in fact, the outcasts are precious people who have much to give. Deafness is not a curse from God; however, people choose to set limits on themselves and others because of their own insecurities and fear. Children who are deaf should be encouraged to develop their intellectual, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual selves because, like hearing children, they are precious and wonderful gifts from God.

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